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THE SPIRIT OF MODERN CRITICISM



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THE SPIRIT
OF
MODERN CRITICISM

An Essay on Judicial Pragmatism

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PREFACE.

Is Modern Criticism mere Anarchy? If not, what is the philosophy which underlies it? These are the questions that I have endeavoured to answer in the essay which follows.

The subject seems to be one which calls for treatment. Despite the fact that all Criticism must use material derived from contemporaries and predecessors, I hope that my manner of treating my material is sufficiently original to warrant my claiming it as my own. I have endeavoured to make all my debts plain and visible, either in the body of the text or in the footnotes.

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CHAPTER I.

THE REVIEWER AND THE CRITIC.

IN popular parlance the distinction between "reviewing" and "criticising" is rarely observed. One hears far too frequently of a review of Macaulay's, for example, spoken of as criticism, which very often it is not. Even speakers usually careful in the use of language will speak of having read a "critique" of a play or a novel in their favourite newspaper, when one of the words "review," "description," or even "advertisement" should have been employed. A review proper at its best does all the work of a judge who refuses to take sides in a particular case, who sums up impartially the evidence on both sides, and then turns to the jury and says, "Gentlemen, you are the judges of fact : you have now heard all the evidence, and it is for you to pronounce your verdict."

Criticism begins where reviewing leaves off. There are judges who deem it their duty not only to lay all the relevant facts before the jury but also to show them on which side truth or the greater probability lies, to guide, in short, and direct the jury to their verdict. Such judges are in literature called critics.

A reviewer collects the evidence, a critic adjusts the scales and weighs it. His theory of criticism is his balance and without that he must not be called a critic.

As criticism is work that requires much time to bring it(?) to maturity, and distance from the battle to ensure clearness of vision, we look to the reviewer to fill the gap, and afford material for the potential critic who sits in the breast of each

of us to pronounce an interim judgment. Reviewing, then, is of the highest interest, utility, and importance, and is perhaps most valuable when the reviewer of contemporary work exercises sufficient self-denial not to trespass into the confines of criticism. An art product can hardly be criticised in the week of its birth. Even Macaulay was sportsman enough to observe the great law, "Fishes below a certain length must be thrown back into the water," and so waited for the eleventh edition of *The Omnipresence of the Deity* before damning eternally "Satan" Montgomery. Critics who ignore this rule, and there have been such, know their business as little as would an accoucheur who should say to a patient exhausted by travail, "Madam, you have wasted your time! Your son is doomed to be hanged!" A good reviewer, on the other hand, is like one of those kindly gossips who feel privileged to be present at the ushering into the world of some new-comer, and who will show you his features and the points of resemblance to his father or his Aunt Jane, and who realise with Wordsworth the truth:

"And you must love him, ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love."

A reviewer like Macaulay or the greatest of all reviewers, Sainte-Beuve, may at times be a critic, and a critic of profession may act as reviewer, but it is always useful for the reader to keep the distinction between criticism and review clearly in mind. By a review he is invited implicitly to become judge; in a criticism he is asked to assent to a judgment considered and delivered.

From this one would draw the inference that criticism is a much rarer and harder thing than reviewing, and literary history confirms the truth of the corollary.

THE MEANING AND USES OF CRITICISM AND CRITICS.

Literary criticism is the art of judging or appraising beauty in literature. Beauty is the quality or combination of

qualities in an object which when perceived or in the perceiving stimulates the imagination and arouses a certain pleasurable emotion, hence called aesthetic pleasure. It is doubtful if beauty can be analysed much farther as it is one of the fundamental data of our consciousness. We all know what beauty is, but cannot describe clearly the pleasure we derive from it. It has plainly a lower and a higher element, the former sensuous connected with the pleasurable stimulation of our bodily organs, the latter intellectual :

“Sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart ;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration.”

Each sense has its own proper pleasure, and we may speak, if we choose, of a beautiful taste, smell, or touch, sound, or sight. As there is less of the intellectual element in the three former we try to restrict the term beauty to sounds, or sights, or thoughts. The more we can depress the sensuous element, the higher does the beauty appear to mount :

“That blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened ; that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on—
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body and become a living soul ;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.”

Intellectual and spiritual harmony, then, and the deep power of joy are according to the teachings of Wordsworth, that prophet and interpreter of the beautiful, a mark of intense beauty. We may depress sensuous pleasure to such an extent that an almost purely spiritual pleasure is felt with

at first even pain on the sensuous side, till, as in the state called ecstasy, sense-perception vanishes. This sublimated beauty which causes ecstasy is known as the sublime. Keats describes the beginning of the state :

“ My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense
 ’Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thy happiness.”

Wordsworth has a similar thought in the poem from which we have already quoted :

“ That time is past,
 And all its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures.”

Of beauty there are two kinds, the one not made by man or natural beauty,* the other made by man and called art. The pleasures of the lower senses are ministered to by the art of cooking and the art of the perfumer : tactile sensations have no special art, but share in all. The ear has the arts of music and song, the eye painting, architecture, and sculpture. To represent its thoughts or feelings the mind uses other symbols known as words, and the art of representation by combination of words is what we call literature, and it appeals principally to eye and ear.

Beauty in literature is then the symbolic quality which words have of reproducing the pleasure aroused by the things, whether external, or thoughts, desires, or memories, symbolised.

Again, in literature the term aesthetic beauty is reserved as a rule for pleasures of eye, ear, and mind. An advertisement, for example, of a new brand of chocolates may make our mouths water, but we should hardly say that it possessed

* “ The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunset, diffused over a known and familiar landscape. . . . *These are the poetry of nature.*” (Coleridge.)

aesthetic beauty, whereas a collection of words which produced upon us the effect of a beautiful sight or of beautiful music would be called beautiful.

However, by the laws of association or of contrast of ideas, the description of a taste or an odour may evoke more spiritual associations, and so a poet may use such a description to produce the emotion of the beautiful :

"It smelt so faint, and it smelt so sweet,
It made me creep, and it made me cold !
Like the scent that steals from the crumbling sheet
Where a mummy is half unroll'd."

In the same way Milton, Keats, and other poets will use descriptions of tactile sensations or of the taste of food or drink to aid our imagination to create beauty :

"A table richly spread in regal mode,
With dishes piled and meats of noblest sort
And savour, beasts of chase, or fowl of game
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boiled,
Grisamber-steamed."

As literary artists are primarily concerned with the production of the beautiful in literature and of re-creating in the minds of hearers or readers their own emotions by means of symbols, it might be urged that critics are unnecessary, being but poor middlemen holding their farthing tapers to the sun. This is sometimes, but not always, true. Yet we do need critics, as we often need wise guides to beautiful scenery. Such guides as are really wise are silent in the presence of the sublime. But until the point of appreciation is reached they can do great service in a toilsome mountain climb. They point out the pitfalls, encourage the struggles up the great heights. They know the best points of view, and are ready to lend their more powerful glasses, for beauty is not always near at hand, nor easy of access, nor on the surface. The imagination must be trained to appreciate it, and greater training will always lead to even greater appreciation. Although it is true that when the sun rises we need no glasses to

see it, nor elder brother to nudge our elbow, yet that trained critic, the astronomer, may help us to a fuller appreciation even of the sun. Or, as Churton Collins once put it, "If the poet is the interpreter of God to mankind, the critic is the interpreter of the poet to individual men."

Good critics are primarily connoisseurs of the beautiful and in their own humble way play their part in its creation. They stimulate and prepare the way for the poet or literary artist. They help him in his work of giving sight to the blind, music to the deaf, and souls to the dead.

Secondarily, they are scientists. They collect and classify facts and search into general laws. They act as reviewers, historians, at times the humble but necessary scavengers, at times the astronomers of literature. Once the critic usurped a position which was not his, and played the monarch and gave laws to poets, just like some mad astronomer attempting to patronise the stars or to issue edicts to the planets. Criticism to-day has entered into itself and descended from its mad tub of a throne and is humble, having cast dust and ashes on its head for its eighteenth century midsummer madness. The ass's head has been removed from Bottom who presumes no longer to give laws to Titania and the fairies. And owing to his humility the true critic is exalted amongst us.

Poets, too, have been in the ranks of professed literary critics and have done good service, witness Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. But it seems probable that a poet cannot spend his energies on other work such as criticism, or political controversy, or lecturing, or inspecting schools, without some loss to his poetry. Poetry is a jealous mistress and is apt to punish divided attentions. A star that turns astronomer will forget to shine.

Finally the supreme gift of the critic is summed up in the metaphorical phrase, good taste. Taste is a property common to all of us. We taste our food and then pronounce judgment upon its quality. Yet, even in this lower department of life,

men of a refined and experiencing taste are set apart from their fellows to act as their intermediaries, and pronounce judgments on goods intended for popular consumption. Thus we have cheese-tasters, tea-tasters, wine-tasters. In the same way publishers and editors employ book-tasters, such as was George Meredith. A critic is then a book-taster, and he will be a great critic if like Hazlitt he has the true gusto for great literature. And it should never be forgotten that it takes a longer and harder apprenticeship to form the critical palate for things of the mind than the sensual palate for wine or tobacco. If this were always remembered, we should be less often offended by the critical impertinences of some half-baked critic recommending wares that are rotten or stale, unripe or immature. But as all good critics know this, we have a rough and ready test to distinguish the good of their profession from the bad. Arrogance is a sure mark of a bad critic, as a certain humble self-distrust—never, however, approaching the timid, hedging cowardice of the impostor—is a mark of the expert. The good critic will tell us, as Anatole France expresses it, the adventures of his own soul among books with the object of leading us to the adventures which are worth the quest, of leading us away from Sloughs of Despond. And we shall follow him as Dante followed Virgil; we shall heed so blessed a one as Dante heard Beatrice.

And the poets, whom we find and follow, will though dead live in us again and will fare on our adventure with us.

*"Questi, che guida in alto gli occhi miei
E quel Virgilio, dal qual tu togliesti
Forza a cantar degli uomini e de' dei."*

("For he who guides my pen
To things on high is Virgil, who of yore
Inspired thy soul to sing of gods and men.")

Matthew Arnold, the poet-critic, in his *Essay on the Function of Criticism*, that *Apologia pro domo sua*, tells us of the debt that poets owe to critics. Simylus, a poet of the fourth century B.C., anticipated him when in enumerating the

six things necessary to make a poet he includes with gratitude "a critic able to seize what is said." For a poet singing to a generation unprepared for his message is but a trumpeter in the city of the deaf.

And knowing this, Wordsworth and Coleridge, finding no other trumpeters ready for the work, seized themselves the bugle of criticism and in due season overthrew the Jericho which had been erected against them and their works.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMPRESSIONIST REVOLT IN CRITICISM.

Periodically during the world's silly seasons a debate perhaps as old as man himself is raised : Is there such a thing as progress ? or Are we better than our ancestors ? The question must be old, because we find it in some form or another in our oldest literature : it is ever living, because we find it in every home where the old, as long as there have been old people, unite in shaking their heads over the mental, physical, and moral degeneration of the modern, while the young protest more or less openly against the oldness of the old, their attachment to etiquettes, regulations, forms and ceremonies, as useless and meaningless as they are venerable. The first literary genius of the Greeks crystallises the complaint of the old in his Nestor. Horace knows all the points of the debate. It forms the subject of a hot literary battle-royal in the days of Louis XIV., the echoes of which are to be found in the writings of our own Pope and Swift. In modern times it is taken for granted that the evolution dogma has settled the case for ever on the side of the young, although philosophers have written and are writing learned books to show that progress is not a necessity of evolution or is not an historic fact.

The question luckily cannot be settled, and it will probably fire the imaginations of our last descendants to linger on when the sun is withdrawing from the universe its central heating. Only Omniscience could answer a question as to progress

when there is an infinity of diverse movements in diverse directions. And the question, too, is meaningless unless one knows whence one started and whither one intends or is intended to go.

With this eternal and insoluble question both the history of politics and of literary criticism, of two sciences namely which came to the birth together, have had much to do. In the history of politics we can trace the long slowly-ascending curve of democracy, in literary criticism a parallel curve of freedom in criticism, of revolution against tyrants and established dynasties. When at any period the influence of a strong central authority or oligarchy was at its highest, then the verdict in the debate, the Ancient Spirit against the Modern, would be given for the former : in the present age of democracy the victory appears to be resting with the latter. The function of the modern critic is precisely what Matthew Arnold held to be the function of the poet, the application of modern ideas to life.

In the domain of literary criticism we can see, if we but look backward, that there are two divergent branches of the main stream. These two tendencies do not, as is sometimes thought, diverge on a question of law but upon a question of fact. On what do we or are we to base our literary judgments ? (On the object in itself or upon our own impressions of it ?) It is clear that the tendency of the former will be authoritarian and will be to lay stress upon the objectivity of laws, while the latter will be freer and will be inclined to place its emphasis upon change. Both sides will pay respect to some sort of law, as the functions of a critic are to a greater or less extent those of some sort of a judge ; and it must be remembered that even a judge of so capricious a thing as fashions judges according to some code.

It will be noticed further that, although in studying the history of literary criticism both tendencies may be traced in the same critic, yet upon the whole the general direction of the curve of criticism has been towards freedom, and that our

modern criticism marks the apex of the impressionist revolt against the authoritarian objective criticism which held almost entire sway during the eighteenth century.

In spite of the teaching and writing of the half-century that has elapsed since the publication of Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*, of an age more distinguished in criticism than in any other department of literature, many scholars, to say nothing of the great mass of readers, are by no means clear in their minds as to the objects and aims of modern literary criticism or as to the ideal which a sane critic should set before him. It shall be then the task of this essay to discuss such aims and ideals.

One of our latest and most interesting critics, Mr. T. S. Eliot,* is pessimistic as to the critical accomplishment of the present age and thinks that no conclusion is any more solidly established than it was in 1865—the date of the publication of the *Essays in Criticism*—and that if Matthew Arnold were alive he would have all his work to do again. Mr. Eliot finds the fault to be the same as Arnold found it, the indifference of the English-speaking public to questions of art, their apathy in part the cause, in part the effect of their crass ignorance of art values. And like Arnold he looks for consolation to France, where such things are ordered better.

Granting (which we do not) the superiority of the Latin races in general in appreciation of art, granting their keener natural artistic sensibility, yet we must also, if Mr. Eliot's indictment be true, blame our teachers as well as ourselves if in fifty years' time no progress has been made amongst us. What have our critics, the teachers, been doing? Is it possible that they have been muddle-headed, blind leaders of the blind, wandering round in circles and making no progress this last half-century? One would suspect that this must be in whole or in part the case if we have not in reality progressed beyond the halting-place of Matthew Arnold who, as Mr.

* *The Sacred Wood* (1920).

Eliot says rightly, was "a propagandist rather than a critic, a popularizer rather than a creator."

Professor Vaughan,* on the other hand, is of opinion that later critics have not advanced beyond Carlyle, in fact "can hardly be said to have yet filled out the design that he laid."

This pessimism as to modern criticism may be due in the case of Mr. Eliot to his failing to notice the full implication of his summary of Arnold's accomplishment as critic. Matthew Arnold, much as he did to create an atmosphere, did not succeed in forming a school and so with him we reach a dead-end in criticism. There was no definite philosophy underlying Arnold's critical work. His was the mind of a classic who, born in a romantic age and under the spell of the masters of that age, and especially in criticism of Wordsworth, yet had a hankering after clear-cut logical definitions and precise commandments, and so naturally looked to France and Germany where self-contained philosophic systems were to be found and practised. France, owing to the historic supremacy of its prose, will be the last Latin country to abandon logic as the supreme arbiter in life and literature, although the most powerful attack upon logical criticism has come in our own days from that country, always the fruitful mother of criticism. In Germany the logic of Hegel reigned supreme and the dialectic of Hegel is simply Aristotle writ large.

Professor Vaughan seems to us to be right in ascribing the dominating position in our modern criticism to Carlyle, but he perhaps did not observe that our critics of to-day, who owe so much to Carlyle, have behind them the support of a modern philosophy and so are carrying on the work of Carlyle with clearer ideas of their aims than had that great master. Carlyle is influenced everywhere by the idealism of Fichte, and all idealisms carry within themselves the seed of pragmatism just as surely as the idealism of Berkeley leads logically to the scepticism of Hume. The work of Carlyle foreshadows

* *English Literary Criticism* (Blackie & Son).

our modern pragmatic criticism of literature just as truly as it contains in itself in embryo the political philosophy of Nietzsche.

Literary men, wrote Carlyle, show God's everlasting wisdom "in such particular form as their own particular times require it in. For each age, by the law of its nature, is different from every other age, and demands a different representation." To-day this is a commonplace, but not so at a time when the phantom of *a priori* critical laws based upon an *a priori* aesthetic still haunted the minds of men.

From this idea of varying changing forms all in their own way right there is only a step to the modern pragmatic teaching that each individual is a class in itself and cannot be judged by any laws except the laws of its own being.

The spirit of modern criticism is to examine with tolerance each work as an individual manifestation apart from any logical prejudices as to its class, recognising with the pragmatist that classifying should be a secondary consideration, a method of convenience rather than a first principle necessitated by some eternal *a priori* categories. Logical classification for the pragmatist has little to do with life, formal logic itself being considered but a means of securing verbal consistency, and as dealing primarily with words rather than with things.

Although we can find foreshadowings of the generous modern spirit right down the ages from Longinus to Dryden, Goethe, and Carlyle, yet it is not improper to speak of modern literary criticism as dating from 1888, the year which in England witnessed the death of Matthew Arnold and the commencement in France of the duel between Ferdinand Brunetière on the one side and Anatole France and later Jules Lemaître upon the other.

In *La Vie Littéraire* (1888, First Series) Anatole France stoutly denied the existence of objective criticism or of objective art, holding that those who flatter themselves that they put anything but themselves into their work are dupes of the

most fallacious illusion, one of the greatest miseries of the world being that man cannot get out of himself. The good critic is then the man who relates the adventures of his own soul among masterpieces.

Ferdinand Brunetière, the last and in some ways the greatest of the French school of scientific objective critics, attacked* these critical dicta as leading to pure anarchy. He remarked that according to Anatole France nothing is sure. On the contrary, he argued, the whole business of life consists in escaping from our ego, and that otherwise there would be no such thing as society or language, literature or art at all. That as men we are such by the power we possess above all of going out of ourselves to seek and find and recognise our own selves in others. Brunetière further asserted that the agreement about certain writers which does exist proves the objectivity of criticism. He quoted in support the well-known dictum of Jules Lemaître (a leader with Anatole France of the impressionist school) in his *Les Contemporains* (1886-1889) that it is an established fact among literary men that certain authors *exist*.

Jules Lemaître in the criticism from which Brunetière quoted was attacking the latter's main critical position and showing that Brunetière succeeded best as a critic, not when or because he was applying his own principles of scientific evolutionary criticism, but simply and subjectively when he loved and was in sympathy with the authors whom he criticised.† But he went on to show that the demand for sympathy did not involve a childish ranking of all writers as of the same value, that a clearing and a sorting took place naturally and almost spontaneously ; that some books, although

* *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1st January, 1891).

† Excellent examples of the truth of this position will be found on all sides in our own literature. Witness the excellence of the peasant Carlyle's criticism of the work of the peasant Burns, with whom he could sympathise, and his failure to appreciate Scott, with whom he had fewer sympathies.

they might have passed through a number of editions, are clearly not art products and so not subjects for the critic; that certain writers despite their oddities and faults *exist*, while others palpably do not. Lemaître, in opposition to Brunetière, maintained France's thesis that there can be no scientific laws of criticism, that there can be at best a method proceeding subjectively by sympathy. That although a critic will feel genuine pain because of the faults of a writer whom he loves, yet he will feel that these faults are a necessary part of the writer just as M. Brunetière's austerity, rigidity, and unco' goodness are all lovable faults of a great master of criticism. Lemaître would not, he says, have it otherwise, for it all adds to the amusement and interest of life. What in the last analysis is interesting in a work of art is the mind of the artist.

"What one loves in you, madame, is—you!" What pleases in even the severest article of M. Brunetière is M. Brunetière.

Anatole France in his answer* to Brunetière's attack continues to deny that criticism has any definite standards or can have any such, everything in arts and literature depending entirely upon the personal equation. He quotes Brunetière against himself: "To omit our contemporaries, to whom as all admit we are too close to see properly, how many and how diverse the judgments have not men, during the last three or four centuries, delivered on a Corneille or a Shakespeare, or a Cervantes, or a Rabelais, or a Raphael, or a Michael Angelo! Just as there is no opinion, however extravagant or absurd, which some philosopher has not upheld, so there is none, however scandalous or derogatory to great genius, which cannot shelter itself under the authority of some critic's name." Even if M. Lemaître's two lists of writers who do and who do not exist could be made out, no two critics would be found to be in agreement even here.

As Dr. Richard G. Moulton says :* “Speaking broadly, the whole history of criticism has been a triumph of authors over critics. . . . I believe that the ordinary reader, however familiar with notable blunders of criticism, has little idea of that which is the essence of my argument—the degree of regularity, amounting to absolute law, with which criticism, *where it has set itself in opposition to freedom of authorship*, has been found in time to have pronounced upon the wrong side.”

Purely theoretically, a scientific method of criticism based upon purely scientific grounds and partaking of the certainty of science is, argues Anatole France, conceivable, but as a practical fact we have it not, and it is doubtful if it would be a great blessing, even if we possessed it. “Beauty, virtue, and genius will forever guard their secret. Neither the charm of Cleopatra, nor the sweetness of Saint Francis d’Assisi, nor the poetry of Racine, will allow themselves to be reduced to formulae. If these things are in any way related to science, it is to a science which is blended with art, intuitive, restless, forever unfinished. This science, or rather this art, exists. It is philosophy, ethics, history, criticism—in short, the whole beautiful romance of humanity.”

M. Brunetière’s affirmation that according to France nothing is sure need not, thinks the latter, involve a charge of absolute scepticism, as he has always believed in the relativity of things and in the succession of phenomena. “In fact, reality and appearance—it is all one. To love and to suffer in this world, images suffice : there is no need for their objectivity to be demonstrated.” Dealing with the place of logic in literary criticism, Anatole France makes his most amusing thrust : “For M. Ferdinand Brunetière there are simply two kinds of criticism : the subjective, which is bad, and the objective, which is good. According to him, M. Jules Lemaître, M. Paul Desjardins, and myself are tainted with subjectivity, and that is the worst of evils : for

* *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (Third Edition, p. 8).

from subjectivity one falls into illusion, into sensuality, and into concupiscence, and judges the works of man by the pleasure they afford, which is an abomination. For one ought not to be pleased with any product of the mind before one knows whether one is right in being pleased; for man being a rational animal he ought first to use his reason; for to be right is necessary, but it is not necessary to find pleasure; because it is the property (as logicians say) of man to seek to instruct himself by the method of logic, which is infallible; and so one should always put a truth at the end of a chain of reasoning, like a knot at the end of a plait; for otherwise the chain would not hold, and it has got to hold; and thus several syllogisms may be joined together in such a way as to form an indestructible system—which lasts ten or eleven years. And this proves that objective criticism is the only good criticism.”

Anatole France sees that literary criticism depends upon the fact that man is a social organism and not upon any necessary laws of an *a priori* aesthetic. He admits, too, that all things in the universe are inextricably intertwined, but humorously complains that “the links of the chain are, in places, so jumbled that the devil himself could not disentangle them, although he is a logician.”

Aesthetics has been founded by some upon ethics, by others upon sociology. But, proceeds Anatole France, despite Auguste Comte, neither of these sciences exists. Nor is there any biology. When an exact biology has been established perhaps in some millions of years, it may be possible to establish after a great number of centuries a sociology. Then alone will it be possible to create an aesthetic science on solid foundations. By that time our planet will be very old, and the sun will be all spots, and “the last men, taking refuge in the depths of mines will be less anxious to dispute about the nature of the beautiful than to burn their last lump of coal before plunging into the everlasting ice.”

The revolt then in modern times is against rigid self-contained systems and fixed standards : in France against the scientific school of Taine and Brunetière, in England against the attempt of Matthew Arnold to thrust upon us an Academy of Exactness. It must always be remembered about Matthew Arnold, however, that in spite of much of his theory of criticism, in practice he was more often than not a subjective critic and did not apply the critical pocket-rule whose use he urges upon others.

As in spite of twentieth century feeling and practice the question is still a live one, we might now proceed to consider briefly the possibility of a Science of Criticism.

CHAPTER III.

IS A SCIENCE OF CRITICISM POSSIBLE ?

As the existence of greater or less skill in any profession seems to imply a science in the background, it must be supposed that there is such a thing as a Science of Criticism. Anatole France, with all his insistence upon the subjective side of criticism, would hardly deny that a good critic could give reasons for the taste that is in him, and for his subjective method. That, even if criticism in practice is no more than recounting the adventures of the soul of the critic, his literary excursions, there is a scientific mode of proceeding upon adventures, and that an adventure need not be wholly and purely a haphazard proceeding, nor an adventurer great because he has no compass. As we have already seen, M. France tacitly admits this position when he defends himself from the charge of literary scepticism, which would mean anarchy in criticism.

The idealistic world of Berkeley or the purely subjective world of M. France has still room for the Law of Gravity and other laws of the succession of phenomena. To take the great Frenchman's witty attack upon M. Brunetière too seriously would be to exaggerate what after all is not a plea for anarchy, but for greater freedom, a protest against the despotism of a Code Napoléon in Criticism. MM. Taine and Brunetière are true to their national sentiments or prejudices in their love of logic and of rigid pigeon-hole classifications, but no one, least of all an Englishman, can be angry with a French critic who distrusts pigeon-holes in the world of the spirit. The whole history of English poetry from Chaucer to Browning shows that its great writers have been acclaimed

as geniuses, in so far as they have succeeded in freeing themselves most completely from the critical fetters of French logic. The history of English prose, of course, has the opposite tale to tell.

We may cheerfully admit that criticism is not, most probably cannot be, an exact science. As Aristotle said of Politics, we are now dealing with a subject in which from the very nature of the case there can be no certainty, but by a judicious use of the genetic method we may arrive at greater probabilities. The Science of Criticism, like the Science of Politics or of Sociology, is still inchoate, and perhaps ever in the making. As Aristotle put it, the certainty of mathematics is not to be looked for in matters of this kind, but yet we may use a scientific method in pronouncing an ethical judgment or in our criticism of poetry. Even in mathematics itself we have a scientific method of dealing with variables. And the fact that criticism must be largely subjective, that taste is a variable, need not detract from the value of a scientific procedure any more than the necessity for eliminating the personal equation detracts from the value of scientific observations in astronomy or physics.

As Mr. J. M. Robertson justly remarks :—

*Moral "science" and the "science" of ethics are phrases in unchallenged use. It will appear that there is a sense in which processes of literary and aesthetic judgment may be put under a scientific treatment. The sense of right and wrong in conduct is clearly as relative, as variable, as the sense of good and bad in literature and art. It varies with periods, with countries, with times of life. . . . It is the same with what we call "critical" judgment—the judgment of literary quality, of merit in literature and in literary men. But if in the field of ethical judgment there can be science, that is, ordered and concatenated reasoning, consistent inference, coherent explanation, the same is possible in the field of literary judgment.**

* *New Essays towards a Critical Method* (1897), p. 7.

From the critical work extant of MM. Jules Lemaitre and Anatole France we may be sure they would be the last to dispute so modest a claim.

Criticism could not be, one would further agree, an exact science, because it deals in the final analysis with Beauty, which is a matter primarily of feeling, of intuiting, rather than of knowing.

At first sight, however, it might seem that it ought to be in its primary application an exact science because it has primarily to deal with the concrete, with the embodiment of the ideal and the spiritual, with the materialisation of the Beautiful, with the functions of an artist as given in our greatest artist's famous definition :—

And as Imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

And hence arises this doubt : Does not modern Experimental Psychology show us that quantitative analysis may be applied to some of our sensations, and might it not similarly be possible to invent a machine able to register degrees of the feeling of Beauty ?

It would be rash in these days to set limits to the possibilities of Science, yet we already possess the nearest approach to such a machine in the sensitive mind of the trained individual critic (such as Anatole France), who registers for us his aesthetic impressions in the form of literary criticism. We have had, and always will have, creative geniuses in criticism, just as we have had in other branches of literature, and like all geniuses they will proceed intuitively with little or no explicit knowledge of the laws upon which they act. So, in athletic exercises of the body, such as golf, we have men we may call geniuses in their own art, who will drive their ball unerringly to the mark with little knowledge of laws anatomical or other, on which the accuracy of their aim depends. But with the modesty of true genius, while they

would be the first to proclaim their ignorance of such laws, they would be the last to deny their existence. "It is just knack," they would say. And "knack" means luck reduced to law or habit. And so it is in criticism and literature at large. A Shakespeare or a Dryden has the knack, and would, one may feel sure, be supremely interested to hear the literary anatomist explain how it was all done, and on what scientific laws it depended. Nor in literary criticism need the absence of such genius prevent men of talent from studying and imitating the scientific methods discoverable in the intuitions of the masters in whose footsteps they tread, any more than in a game like golf should the player of ambition refuse to acquire by laborious study the professional's intuitive "knack." And History tells us that in Literature as in Golf, geniuses may be made as well as born. The truth perhaps is that geniuses are always made and never born, a Shakespeare just as much as a Stevenson, a Keats as well as a Milton, a Homer as a Virgil; but that the former by the rapidity of their movement seem to us purely intuitive, while the formation of the latter is slower and more in evidence. Although lightning defeats the clumsy measurements of our stop watches, yet it is a measurable force all the same.

If the sensitised plate of the prepared critical mind registers for us the aesthetic appreciations known as Literary Criticism, it is to the wider register of History that we are to look for a check upon the individual critic. Here is it true that "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*," for it is from History that we may learn how to correct the bias of environment, how to discount the present value of all criticism, how to reduce our calculations to terms of sea-level.

We know that criticism, like all Literature, is a reflection of the life, and depends on the thought and social conditions of its period, so that its canons must be in the main purely relative. Nation will differ from nation, tribe from tribe, people from people, nay, the same people will differ at different periods of their national life and social development.

The music that ravishes a Chinaman will be judged by an Englishman a beastly noise ; the statue of Aphrodite Anadyomene will arouse different sensations in the breast of a Parisian artist, a Zulu, and an Elder of the Kirk. Though Beauty itself is, we may suppose, a universal, a general idea, its variations are infinite, innumerable the forms under which it manifests itself, and so it is to the trained eye of the critic that we look to detect Proteus under whatever form he choose to lurk. And it is in this sense that the poet drunk with Beauty meant us to take his famous "*Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.*"

Beauty as a Universal is One, Truth as a Universal is One, and as Universals they are One, and as the mystic would add, the One is God.

Beauty and Truth are but different aspects of the same Harmony. Ugliness and Falsity do not exist in reality, they merely subsist, being Beauty and Truth in a wrong relation, just as a discord is but a chord out of time, or, as the whole philosophy of Browning teaches, Evil is but Good out of place.

The Universal, however, is the business not of Literary Criticism or of Politics, but of Aesthetic or of Ethics. And for the practical purposes of Criticism History has to be our final Court of Appeal, and it is to her that we must look for guidance, procedure, and laws. Beyond her at present we cannot go, for a Science of Aesthetic is as yet only a possibility but not an established fact. We cheerfully recognise that the philosophy which underlies the laws we thus obtain is pragmatism. It is only in modern times that this truth has been fully recognised, and this forms the great line of demarcation between the older and the newer Romantic Criticism.

The Romantic movement in literature, which culminated in the nineteenth century in the poetry of Keats and the criticism of Shelley in England, and in France in the poetry and criticism of Victor Hugo, gave Ancient Criticism its death-blow, but

in both countries a further step had to be taken. Although the early Romantic Criticism was wide, free, and generous, compared with the Dogmatic Criticism which it displaced, yet it took some time for the critics to free themselves from the mythological *Aberglaube*. Matthew Arnold, as we have seen, had hankerings after the old classical gods, and, pleasing as so much of his practice is, yet in his precepts he shows no advance upon Dryden, Coleridge, Goethe, or Carlyle. In France the doctrines of Evolution and the advance of biological science seemed to afford an opportunity for a new critical dogmatism, and we have already seen how Anatole France and Jules Lemaître vindicate the liberties which had been won by Victor Hugo.

In England the work of our youngest school of critics has been profoundly influenced by that of the French Critical Symbolists, to use the label affixed to French Pragmatic Criticism by Lemaître. In practice we may be no freer or more untrammelled than such masters as Dryden, Coleridge, and Carlyle in the past, but in theory we have outstripped them and also Matthew Arnold, simply because we have found the philosophy which underlies so inexact a science as ours, that philosophy being what William James called Pragmatism. And the first axiom of this Philosophy is, "*What works must be held true, as long as it works.*" This is the first axiom of all sciences of expedience, such as Politics and the like. This is the basis of the philosophy of Shakespeare's dramatic art, which may be summed up in the formula: What I can induce an audience to believe, that is dramatic truth. This axiom again is the basic principle which underlies our arch-pragmatist Aristotle's teaching concerning the *Οἰκέλας Ἠδονή* and which underlies all great criticism, such, for example, as Coleridge's definition of poetic faith ("that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment") or the best judgments in Dr. Saintsbury's *History of Criticism*, or in Francis Thompson's *Essay on Shelley*.

It is, one would say, a by no means difficult task to trace

the upward curve of the theory of criticism up to our own day. The Evolution of Literary Criticism in England begins as it began in France* with (i) Blind Acceptance of Classical Models. Then, when Europe began to be flooded with classical works at the time of the Renaissance, the necessity arose of dissecting these potential models in order to discover both their comparative merit and if possible the secret of their structure. This leads to works of Rhetoric rather than of Literary Criticism properly so called, to discussion of tropes and verbal beauty, and it is hopelessly hampered in any good it may accomplish by coming too many centuries in advance of the beginnings of Scientific Philology. (ii) The second stage of Criticism is that of Comparative Anatomy, of the Grammarians, of the Renaissance critics, in England of the Elizabethan critics. (iii) The third stage is, now that the models are established, to find out from them the rules to which all good work in the various determined species must conform. This is the so-called Classical Age of Criticism, which honouring Horace and his laws gave us Boileau in France, and Pope, Johnson, and our early nineteenth century reviewers in England. *The Edinburgh Review* of October, 1802, commences, as all will remember, its review of Southey's *Thalaba* with the common profession of faith of all Classical Critics :—

Poetry has this much, at least, in common with religion, that its standards were fixed long ago by certain inspired writers whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question.

This third stage is in strictness the First Age of an Organic Criticism which until it takes this form is still only embryonic. It bears the same relationship to the stage which evolves from it, as Astrology does to Astronomy, the pseudo-science having to come first to prepare the way for the science. A pseudo-science is a science which is logical but is built upon a fallacy. With regard to the Pseudo-Classical Criticism we

* See Brunetière, *L'Evolution de la Critique*.

must remember that a serious fallacy lurked from the very beginning in the words "critic" and "criticism," and as time went on the fallacy grew and became crystallised from its union with philosophy.

As the word "critic" implied a judge, it was assumed that his functions consisted chiefly in the interpretation of pre-existent laws and in decreeing the punishment of offenders. This feeling survives to this day in the use of "critical" for "fault-finding" and in such words as "hypercritical" and the like.

It was altogether lost sight of that a judge need not sit in a law-court and that there are other kinds of laws besides those of a commonwealth.

In the eighteenth century the literary critic, like his learned brother in the law-courts, was a hanging judge. He had his code in the laws that his long line of predecessors had deduced from the Classics, and it was a legal fiction that the Classics had found them in Nature. The fact of a new kind of writer appearing before him was in itself presumptive evidence of the writer's guilt, just as to-day in France under the old unreformed judiciary code the man who attracts the attention of the police is treated by the judge as a criminal, who must have broken the law. Themis with bandaged eyes holding the scales is an exact picture of the methods of the older criticism. In the one pan went the new work and in the other the precedents of antiquity; to all else Themis was blind, but she could easily feel the upward kick of the pan. Occasionally a good-natured judge like Addison would correct the iniquity of judicial impartiality by a little pressure on the side opposed to precedent, but for the most part novelties kicked the beam.

From this arose the necessity of knowing what the laws were, and so the eighteenth century codified and promulgated them. A writer then followed the code or fashion and was hailed as "correct," or disobeyed and was condemned as an outlaw.

Whenever general hardship is felt from the acts of authority, authority is called upon sooner or later to produce its title-deeds, and then spring up official defenders to prove that the titles are valid. Thus, when in England subjects were dissatisfied with the acts of their sovereign, philosophers attempted to prove his right to their obedience on the ground of the Social Contract. The defence is held valid until it occurs to a new rebel to demand evidence for the Social Contract.

The same thing happened in Poetry. Rebels against convention were arraigned on the charge of having broken the fundamental Laws of Poetry. Their mutiny next took the form of denying the cogency of these laws. The answer promptly came that these laws were a tradition of the Ancients and that obedience to them was the cause of the greatness of the classic masterpieces. The rebels then asked if these laws were anterior to the Classics. "Yes," they were told, "they are laws *a priori* eternal, but discovered by the Great Masters and by us derived from their practice, and by you infringed at your peril." "*This will never do !*" is the famous formula in which the Edinburgh Reviewer pronounced the excommunication of Wordsworth's *Excursion*.

But in literature as in religion the blood of martyrs is the seed of a church, and rough treatment seems to make some plants grow stronger. (iv) In England we reach the fourth stage in the Romantic Revolt, which in criticism is associated with the names of Lamb, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Hazlitt. It coincided in time with the French Revolution and was partly due to the new spirit of democracy which was in the air. The change to the literary modern spirit was as catastrophic as the political upheaval which synchronised with it, and which also swept away ancient landmarks and tore up rooted traditions. In France the revolution in literature comes later and centres in the great name of Victor Hugo ; in England the reign of Victoria sees the reign of the new criticism established, and the close of the reign witnesses a strong reaction setting in against it.

Matthew Arnold, who flourished as critic between 1857 and 1888, felt ever more and more strongly that the English love of freedom tended, at all events in literature, to become licence. "*Nor was he wrong*," remarks Dr. Saintsbury,* "*in thinking that there is in the uncultivated and unregenerate English mind a sort of rebelliousness to sound critical principles.*" But where were these "sound critical principles" to be found? The Romantic Revolution had swept away the old laws, and in England, at least, there was no critical Code Napoléon. Matthew Arnold looked then with longing eyes to France and to Germany, where critics were busily constructing new methods (as was Arnold's favourite Sainte-Beuve), or new infallible systems founded on the new scientific theories of Lamarck, Darwin, and Haeckel (as were Taine and Brunetière).

Arnold's method, like that of his great master Sainte-Beuve, is a method of much charm, but is it strictly Literary Criticism? Is it not rather in its last analysis that very necessary propaedeutic to criticism, namely, Reviewing, which consists with Sainte-Beuve, the immortal model for reviewers, in examining the book before him with tolerance and sympathy, and in close connection with the author's life, in laying before his readers the spirit of the author and the book, and in leaving them to draw their own critical conclusions? It is everything which is praiseworthy and delightful, but one can hardly call it Literary Criticism, though it may be much more valuable, and was certainly more valuable than the Procrustean method of Sainte-Beuve's compatriot and contemporary Taine.

Arnold felt this difficulty himself, the want of standards in literary criticism in order to make it something of cogency, something higher than reviewing. He proposed, therefore, as the supreme test in Poetry a kind of literary thermometer graduated by means of the grand style of the classics. But

* *A History of English Criticism* (p. 482).

no critic of the eighteenth century would have asked for more or claimed more. So that in this respect, despite all his charm, despite also the culture that his teaching diffused amongst the Victorian Philistines who needed it so badly, Matthew Arnold cannot be said to belong to the class of Literary Critics like Dryden or Brunetière, but to the class of great Reviewers like Sainte-Beuve. Arnold's second great prepossession was with the question of the connection between Morality and Art. Here he was in opposition to the much subtler critic, the great English stylist, Pater (1839-1894). Pater, the founder of the Aesthetic School, had raised the banner "Art for Art's sake," with the implication that bringing questions of morality into criticism of art is the same as judging music by the sense of smell. The question is still hotly debated and cannot be said to be as yet decided. Matthew Arnold was on the side of the angels, but, unlike Disraeli in his sympathies with Wilberforce against Darwin, it will, we think, be found eventually that here at least Arnold is right, unless we are to think with Anatole France that there is no such thing as a Science of Ethics. If there be such a science, then it will embrace man and all his activities, so that if Art infringes its precepts, it is infringing a higher law. In this region it may be said, though there are many modern dissidents, that Matthew Arnold performed his greatest service to Criticism.

The Romantic School, whether of Poetry or Criticism, had also, it must be remembered, fallacies peculiarly its own. Wordsworth, the Nature Poet, for example, would apply a geometric axiom to things of the spirit, and would too consistently forget that humanity, the part, contains Nature, the whole, and here he marks his inferiority to the greatest poets, such as Shakespeare or Dante or Homer, who never lose sight of this spiritual axiom. In criticism, too, the Romantics did not see clearly to what their revolution had logically committed them. Although they did see that literary art is something higher and nobler than mere imitation of models, yet they held the peculiarly romantic fallacy of universal

standards of beauty, and did not see that, though there may be a Universal of Beauty (which is the province not of criticism but of meta-criticism or Aesthetic), yet the human standard varies with time, place, and social conditions. They saw clearly that the eighteenth century models were out of place when thrust upon an age in which the social conditions were wholly at variance with those under which the great classical models were produced ; but they did not carry the logical process a step further, and come to the conclusion that literature, being a purely social product, must be judged by the social conditions of its place and age. Literature is a social institution rather than something pertaining to the individual, and it is only in logic that man is man before he is a social unit. Food and drink are judged primarily by their power of satisfying the animal wants of the individual animal man ; Literature, on the other hand, like Cookery, is a product of society, and is not primarily to be judged by its appeal to individual man irrespective of social environment and conditions of time and place.

This, the critics of to-day as a whole, do see more clearly than did the general body of critics at any other preceding literary epoch, and this is due to a large extent to the preaching of an old philosophy of freedom under the new names of Pragmatism, Modernism, Humanism, or Symbolism and by such teachers as Pierce and William James in America, Schiller in England, Anatole France, Jules Lemaître, and Bergson in France. The modern spirit is to look upon our critics or judges of literature, as we look upon our judges of wine, roses, and fair women, of blood horses and pedigree dogs. We expect from them expert knowledge, which means knowledge not of canons, if such exist, of a possible Universal called Beauty, but of particular laws which will serve as a rough rule-of-thumb method to judge a particular case. This knowledge by the force of habit has passed into an intuition. In addition, we expect from such judges the most tactful tolerance and the widest sympathies.

A man may be, for example, a competent judge, let us say, of feminine beauty, yet need not desire that ugly women should be decapitated. He would be the first to admit that his judgments are purely pragmatic, and that his competence is circumscribed by the limits of his experience, and his education in taste. Thus Paris of old would hardly be competent to award the golden apple in a Hottentot beauty-show, although he might admit that the beauty of a Hottentot maiden and of the Idalian Venus may some day be brought under some general law of Beauty.

The modern literary critic, while not absolutely denying the possibility of such things as axiomatic *a priori* laws of aesthetics, agrees so far with the Romantic critic that the code of the so-called Classical criticism was crammed full of arbitrary conventions and superstitious followings of the ancients, and that the sooner these were swept away the better. But he goes a stage farther. As to anything worthy of the name of "laws" that might remain, these must be looked upon as modern science looks upon its "laws," *i.e.* as more or less useful generalisations from experience, which are a greater or less approximation to an absolute truth, which is postulated, but which may or may not exist ; which are not juristic laws in any sense ; which have only a relative value, and are to be at once discarded, as soon as they have survived their utility, or when a closer approximation is found. A closer approximation or new law is said to be found whenever it works better, and this is all the test that we possess.

Tradition and history are witnesses as to how the law worked in the past. If Homer and Virgil did not spoil their epics by plunging *in medias res*, then to plunge *in medias res* is the law—for Homer and Virgil, or for any modern who succeeds in writing an epic on those lines. But to deduce that "plunging *in medias res*" is an eternal, *a priori*, axiomatic law for Epic is either rank superstition, or insanity, or at the very best, a doubtful Induction based on too scanty enumeration of instances.

The answer then to the question with which we started, "Is a Science of Criticism Possible?" is, Yes, provided that Criticism makes no higher claims than do any modern sciences connected with human activities, such, *e.g.* as political economy. The philosophy which governs modern sciences is pure Pragmatism, and this is a philosophy which conceives of itself not as a Metaphysic (as to whose claims it is more or less reverently agnostic), but as a temper or a method.

Furthermore, it seems to us, that if we look backwards we shall find that all the great critics of the past have succeeded wherever they have been free, empirical, and pragmatic, as far as the necessary *a priori* limitations of form have permitted. We might test this by considering briefly the history of one branch of Criticism in English Literature, and choosing the history of Translation as our test, since in Translation form is not the primary consideration.

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICISM AND TRANSLATION.

It is a rare phenomenon to find literary criticism in the earliest stages of a nation's culture or in the beginnings of a literature. We do not in Old English possess anything, for example, so early as the Icelandic *Skaldskaparmal*, a kind of *Ars Poetica* or Instruction on the meanings and uses of "kennings," which, as it made for convention in poetry, did more harm than good.

The Heroic Age in our literature is concerned with the oral rather than with the written word, and the *scop* or singer is concerned primarily with how to live rather than with the laws which govern his song. Deor forgets in his resentment to tell us how and why Heorrenda, his successful rival, surpassed him in favour with his former patron; but Widsith, another wandering minstrel, although he may never have heard that "*Poetry is criticism of life*," does remind the great ones of the earth to be kind to poets, inasmuch as their immortality depends upon the humble bard.

In the historical times of our Anglo-Saxon literature, when Christianity brought with it a new culture, translation rather than original composition was of necessity the first consideration. It is noteworthy, however, that King Alfred, our first literary dictator, does proclaim the sound doctrine of freedom and utters a protest against slavishness even in translation. "I have translated," he tells us more than once, "sometimes word for word, sometimes meaning for meaning, as I could interpret it most clearly and intelligibly."

Though it may be thought a small point to make, yet it is gratifying to remember that in so early and so uncritical an

age our greatest king and first great patron of literature did sound a note, however slight, of freedom, and laid down what is admitted to be the soundest maxim for a translator: "The letter killeth, the spirit giveth life." The same principle is attended by success when followed by that "*grand translateur, noble Geffroy Chaucier*," as his French contemporary styles the Father of English Poetry. Chaucer, out of respect to some poet whom he admires, will try to translate "word by word," but with qualified success, for, as he tells us in the Envoy to his *Compleynt of Venus*:

And eek to me hit is a great penaunce,
 Sith rym in English hath swich scarsitee,
 To folowe *word by word* the curiositee
 Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce.

As the rhythm and rhyme are always integral parts of any poem, close translation of verse into verse must be always doomed to failure unless the two languages are closely akin. The causes of the failure spring to the eye, or rather to the ear, when we have a musical setting. Compare, for example, the English translation of the libretto of some great Italian opera with the original, and notice how the singer is forced by the exigencies of music to emphasise the unimportant, and neglect what the composer wishes to be stressed, often with ludicrous results, if one thinks more of the meaning than of the musical accompaniment. On the other hand, contrast German with French verse translations of Shakespeare: the former, on account of the kinship between English and German, are passable, while the latter are failures. If the languages are closely related, we see that close translation is possible of verse into verse; otherwise, the borrower must write a descant, an imitation, a variation of the theme rather than a translation. In prose, although rhythm is important, it is not such an essential as in verse, except possibly in rhetorical prose, which forms the boundary between the two dominions. Here a prose translation of prose, especially into

a language not closely related to the original, must necessarily be halting and fail to produce the same effect as the original. Again, apart from sentence rhythm, a prose translation from a language which possesses in right of its own genius some peculiar properties such as, say, a certain sonorousness and dignity or a wonderful concision and brevity of phrase, is foredoomed to imperfect success. How can one translate satisfactorily even into English prose the Virgilian "*Sunt lacrimae rerum*," or anything of Horace, or of Dante, or such prose as that of Tacitus, such phrases as "*Capax imperii nisi imperasset*" ? And what utter failures are all our translations of the oratory of Cicero ! It is impertinent to say that we get Cicero's meaning when we ought to know well that the rhythm is half the meaning. And although criticism must be chary of canons *a priori*, yet we may, I think, legitimately indulge an *a priori* suspicion, at all events, that "*Traditore traduttore !*" is true when applied to English translations of Russian or Japanese authors.

Chaucer, the most perfect translator in the history of English verse, discovered in the course of his long career as a borrower of other men's goods, this important truth for himself, and gives us in his inspired moments a descant, a translation of spirit (Alfred's "*andgiet of andgiete*") and not an attempt at literal translation. Compare, for example, the metre and spirit of his *A B C* with Deguileville's tame original. Here he has succeeded too well, and has ceased to be translator and has become an original poet. For it must be remembered that a conscientious translator is bound under pain of being guilty of originality to reproduce all the faults of the writer he is interpreting, and to be as flat, banal, dull, insipid, or even as indecent as his copy. Does not Chaucer tell us so ?—

Who-so shall telle a tale after a man,
He moot reherce, *as ny as ever he can*,
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large ;
Or elles he moot telle his tale untrewe.

It is for the very same reason that our next "*grand translateur*," William Shakespeare, is, paradoxically, at the same time the world's most original mind in drama and the greatest borrower of his predecessors' work, translating not merely verbally or line for line from Plutarch, but probably whole plays from unknown predecessors. Just as in commerce we call the thief of genius a Napoleon of finance, so in literature translation ceases to be translation if only it is done on the heroic scale by a Shakespeare, a Molière, a Fitzgerald, or a Chaucer.

In the *Second Nun's Tale* Chaucer shows us in ll. 36-51 ("Thou mayde and moder, daughter of thy sone," etc.), how Dante (*Paradiso*, xxxiii., 1-21, beginning "*Vergine, madre, figlia del tuo Figlio*") should be turned into English. Although he makes mistakes, he has caught the spirit, the essence, of his original, whom here, as he has to do with one of the world's greatest masters, and not a poor Deguileville, he naturally falls short of, though not in every line. In one particular place, however, *The Monk's Tale* (3597-3644), it is open to question if he has not equalled the grandeur of even Dante's Canto xxxiii. of the *Inferno*. For Matthew Arnold is surely palpably wrong when he tells us* that "the accent of such verse as *In la sua volontade è nostra pace* is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach"; Chaucer does attain the accent constantly in single lines. Witness—

The dores were all of adamant eterne,
of the temple of Mars; or his unforgettable picture of an assassin,

The smylere with the knyfe under the cloke,
or,

But Cristes loore, and his Apostles twelve,
He taughte, and first he folwed it hym selve,
of his Town Parson.

But it would take a man of genius other than Chaucer's, a

* Introduction to Vol. I. of Ward's *English Poets*.

poet like Milton, to sustain Dante's accent for a long flight such as Chaucer managed once in *The Monk's Tale*.

No poet affords us a richer supply of models for learning the Art and Practice of Verse Translation than does Geoffrey Chaucer. And this not solely owing to his commanding genius, but because his age was of necessity an age of translation. The necessity lasted till the full tide of the Renaissance had set in with the great Elizabethans, and gave us in prose such models of free translation as Mandeville's *Travels*, and especially Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Lord Berners' *Froissart*.

We have seen that King Alfred, as well as Chaucer, was on the side of freedom in translation, but, as every schoolboy knows from painful experience of different masters, the controversy is still one of living interest.

Sir John Denham (1615-1669) also voted for freedom :—

The servile path thou nobly dost decline
Of tracing word by word and line by line,
Those are the laboured births of slavish brains,
Not the effect of poetry, but pains.
Cheap vulgar arts, whose narrowness affords,
No flight for thoughts, but poorly sticks at words.

(To Fanshaw on his translation of *Il Pastor Fido*.)

The Earl of Roscommon (Wentworth Dillon) follows Denham in his poetical *Essay of Translated Verse* (1681), which is otherwise not noteworthy except for his advice "to seek an author who your way does trend," and for the politeness of Dryden's deference in citing it as the chief authority for his *Essay on Translation* (1685).

As to the great Dryden's theory and practice, we may quote Dr. Johnson's words :—

Ben Jonson thought it necessary to copy Horace almost word by word ; Feltham, his contemporary and adversary, considers it as indispensably requisite in a translation to give line for line. . . . Cowley saw that such copiers were a servile race ; he asserted his liberty, and spread his wings so boldly that he left his authors. It was reserved for Dryden to fix the

limits of poetical liberty, and give us just rules and examples of translation. . . .

In the proper choice of style consists the resemblance which Dryden principally exacts from the translator. He is to exhibit his author's thoughts in such a dress of diction as the author would have given them had his language been English. . . . A translator is to be like his author ; it is not his business to excel him.

Tradition in Dryden's day, owing to the bad example of Ben Jonson's renderings of Horace, of George Sandys' of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Barten Holliday's of Juvenal and Persius, was opposed to the freedom which Dryden vindicated, and in which he followed the practice of Sir Richard Fanshawe's Camoens, of the Virgilian translations of Sir John Denham and Edmund Waller, and of Abraham Cowley's versions of Horace and Martial.

Pope in the preface to his translation of the *Iliad* advocated a middle way between literal translation and free paraphrase. "It is certain," he wrote, "no literal translation can be just to an excellent original in a superior language ; but it is a great mistake to imagine (as many have done) that a rash paraphrase can make amends for this general defect, which is no less in danger to lose the spirit of an ancient by degenerating into the modern manners of expression. If there be sometimes a darkness, there is often a light, in antiquity, which nothing better preserves than a version almost literal."

Perhaps the translations in English where this *juste milieu* advocated by Pope can be seen best are our Authorised Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. In the former, while a simple, straightforward translation is aimed at, an attempt is consistently made to reproduce in the English diction the rhythm of the original languages ; in the latter, by the artful doubling of words and due balance of sentence, with attention to the proper rounding off of the period, an excellent imitation is produced of the majestic dignity and sonorousness of the original Latin prayers. This last is a veritable *tour de force*, and has never been rivalled in any other translation of Latin in the English language.

Fitzgerald in his deservedly famous *Rubáiyát* has at times departed so far from the spirit of the original that in such places his work cannot be called a translation, but a perversion. One would not quarrel with the first stanza, which is merely introductory and contains nothing opposed to Omar's teaching, but his vigorous Stanza 81 (fourth edition),

*Oh, Thou, who Man of Baser Earth did'st make,
And even with Paradise devise the Snake
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!*

cannot be called a translation of Quatrain 236, which (says Professor Cowell) runs in Nicolas's edition :—

*O thou who knowest the secrets of everyone's mind,
Who graspest everyone's hand in the hour of weakness,
O God, give me repentance and accept my excuses,
O thou who givest repentance and acceptest the excuses of everyone.*

So that, great as Fitzgerald's work is as a poem, it cannot be called perfect as the translation which it professed to be, as there must be limits even to the freedom of paraphrase. It is not the business of a translator to correct his author.

A few years after the publication of the first edition of Fitzgerald's poem Matthew Arnold discussed, in three lectures, the question of translating, and took Francis Newman's version of Homer as his text (1861-62). At the beginning of the first lecture he spoke of the dispute as to closeness or freedom as being still unsettled. "Probably both sides would agree that the translator's first duty is to be *faithful*; but the question at issue between them is, in what *faithfulness* consists." Francis Newman condemned the theory "that the reader should, if possible, forget that it is a translation at all, and be lulled into the illusion that he is reading an original work—something original." Matthew Arnold, in a vigorous though not always fair attack upon Newman's work, makes a masterly plea for freedom in translation. Arnold endeavours to establish the following canon: That a translator should

above all be penetrated by a sense of the qualities of his author, and endeavour to reproduce these qualities as best he may in his own language.

Homer, for example, is admittedly "rapid, plain and direct in syntax and words, plain and direct in his matters and ideas, and eminently noble." An adequate translation of Homer must, therefore, contain each of those four qualities. Cowper's version is lacking in rapidity, Pope's in the second attribute, Chapman's in the third, and Newman most conspicuously, because he fails in nobleness.

Arnold in order to describe the union of the translator with his original necessary for good translation borrows Coleridge's description of the union of the soul with the divine essence, and says that it takes place "when the mist which stands between them—the mist of alien modes of thinking, speaking, and feeling on the translator's part *defecates to a pure transparency* and disappears."

This is plainly the highest ideal at which a translator can aim, viz. to preserve his own independence and yet to make it his aim never to sacrifice any of the essential qualities or peculiarities of his author. "The right rule is, all the peculiarities that belong to the author, none that belong merely to his language; and the best example of it is Jowett's *Plato*, where not one ounce of Plato is lost, and not one ounce of Greek retained"—so writes a great modern critic, Mr. John Bailey. That Arnold was in the right of it everyone to-day would, I think, cheerfully admit, although very few would deny that the examples of his own powers as translator as quoted by himself in illustration fall far below his theory. Better examples would be found in many stanzas of Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát* or in William Cory's *Ionica*.

The corollary from Arnold's canon is precisely the maxim we have already quoted from Roscommon. Choose to translate an author with whose spirit your own mind has much in common, and then it will be all the easier for you to reproduce his qualities in your own way.

There is one great fallacy which underlies one kind of close translation, and which too often passes unnoticed, and that is the sophistry contained in the apology for a poor version that it has been, after all, "rendered in the metres of the original." The point, of course, lies in the question : Do the metres necessarily have *the same* effect in the two languages ? Do hexameters in English produce the same effect as Greek or Latin hexameters ? Are sapphics in English the same as the classical sapphic ? Or English alexandrines as French ones, or does *terza rima* in English adequately reproduce the manner of Dante ? Surely not ; but the point is far too often overlooked, and where a translator who understands the original, but has no knack of writing verse, thinks he has notably succeeded, is just where he has most egregiously failed : the letter has killed where the spirit would have given life. We might add that, by the irony of fate, this is why Matthew Arnold's own translations of Homer into hexameters are such palpable failures : Homer could never have recognised the sound of them as true hexameters, though he might have heard the similarity of Hawtrey's. But Arnold, that sharp-sighted critic, was as poet deaf in one ear as his own verse so often attests. Such imitations are only praiseworthy when the translator has a musical ear for correspondences, otherwise he will do best to stick to plain prose.

The sum and substance of the whole question seems to be that the matter of an author is easily translatable, but that to mimic his manner requires extraordinary tact and talent. As Montaigne, speaking of an essay in translation of his own, tells us : " Il faict bon traduire les aucteurs ou il n'y a gueres que la matière à représenter : mais ceux qui ont donné beaucoup à la grace et à l'élégance de langage ils sont dangereux à entreprendre " (*Essays*, Book II., Chap. 12).

But Shelley finds not danger, but impossibility : " Hence the vanity of translation ; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into

another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower—and this is the burthen of the curse of Babel " (*A Defence of Poetry*).

A good translation, then, must be a serious parody, and a man who can write a good parody, such as Chaucer or Calverley, will shine best as a translator, if he gives his mind to it.

CHAPTER V.

DEFINITIONS OF VERSE AND POETRY.

There is one question which has always since it was first raised divided critics, and which is as hotly debated to-day as ever, and that is, What is poetry? Is the antithesis prose, or can prose be poetry? At first blush it would seem that as the dispute concerns a definition of a word, it is of merely verbal importance and that one might pragmatically move the previous question, What difference does it make? and pass on. As, however, this question is the first logically to meet us on the very threshold of criticism, and, as the answer, which a critic makes to it, will have an important effect upon his general critical practice, it is impossible to leave it without discussion.

Two things are generally admitted. First, from Aristotle downward, that verse is not necessarily poetry, that history in verse, for example, need not ("cannot," according to Aristotle), nor need philosophy in verse, be poetry. Secondly, from Aristotle and Dionysius of Halicarnassus to the present day, that good prose has also a rhythm of its own. The elimination of these preliminaries reduces the question to the simpler form, Must poetry be metrical? And metre, in this question, is to be interpreted as a rhythmical or musical scheme or pattern, whether simple or complex. "*A good sentence should have rhythm,*" says Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, "*but not metre; if it have metre it will be a poem.*"

The dispute is modern and in England was started by Wordsworth as a corollary to the thesis contained in the Preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) that there is no such thing as purely poetic diction, "that there neither is, nor can be,

any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." In a footnote appended to the statement: "Poetry sheds no tears 'such as angels weep,' but natural and human tears," he writes, "I here use the word 'poetry' (though against my own judgment) as opposed to the word 'prose' and synonymous with metrical composition. But much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of poetry and prose, instead of the more philosophical one of poetry and matter of fact, or science. The only strict antithesis to prose is metre; nor is this, in truth, a *strict* antithesis, because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose, that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable."

In the last sentence Wordsworth, unlike Aristotle, confuses metre (the formal scheme or pattern) with rhythm (the elements of metre); and he errs against the teaching and practice of all good prose-writers in not seeing that a hybrid is an insult to art as well as to Nature. He may be right in teaching that prose may be poetry, but who will agree with him in thinking that prose may be verse?

Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) examines the critical tenets of Wordsworth, dissenting from the latter's theories of poetic diction but apparently assenting at first to the view that prose may be poetry: "The writings of Plato and Bishop Taylor, and the *Theoria Sacra* of Burnet furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without metre, and even without the contradistinguishing objects of a poem. The first chapter of *Isaiah* (indeed a very large proportion of the whole book) is poetry in the most emphatic sense."

Here Coleridge flagrantly contradicts his own definition of a poem ("that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth"), as he himself sees, for he adds, "yet it would be not less irrational than strange to assert, that pleasure and not truth was the immediate object of the

prophet." Consequently he is forced to make a further distinction between a "poem" and "poetry" and to say "that a poem of any length neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry," whose soul, he continues to argue, is imagination and fancy its drapery. The logical reader will agree that Coleridge's second thought is better than his first, and will probably see that the tangle in the argument is due to Coleridge's failure to observe that it is quite possible for a writer to propose for his immediate object pleasure *as well as* truth. The writer of the *Dies Irae*, for example, surely proposed both as immediate objects, and when a greater poet than Coleridge said, "Truth is beauty, beauty truth," he meant that they could not be separated in presentation.

Leigh Hunt's remark is far subtler than Coleridge's when he says: "Poetry begins where matter of fact or of science ceases to be merely such, and to exhibit a further truth"; and again, "Truth of every kind belongs to the poet, *provided it can bud into any kind of beauty*." In Chap. xviii. of the *Biographia*, Coleridge finally recants and returns to the orthodox tradition. "... The causes elsewhere assigned which render metre the proper form of poetry, and poetry imperfect and defective without metre."

De Quincey follows Coleridge in dividing literature into literature of power and literature of knowledge: the former is to be called poetry whether it be verse or prose.

All our moderns, from Walt Whitman onwards, who admire or who write *vers libres* or verses freed from what is (traditionally) essential to verse are on the same side. In that excellently edited book, *Modern Poetry*,* Guy Pockock puts the case admirably for the modern spirit of freedom, or rather Bolshevism, in verse: "It is only because we are so used to exact form, and metre, and rhyme, that we are predisposed to think that verse that discards them is not poetry at all. Yet this poetry—new to some of us, though not really

* *Kings' Treasuries Series*, 1920: Dent & Sons.

new—does depend on a certain mode of expression, and this mode is called cadence,” which, he proceeds to explain, is not to be measured by feet or beats but by the whole strophe. He selects E. V. Lucas’s *Jack* as a model and adds, “Alter the cadence in, say, verse 9 and the effect is gone.” Verse 9 reads :

Jack was quite as much a part of the village as the church and spire ;
And if any of us lazied along by the river in the dusk of the evening—

Waving aside nebulae of gnats,
Turning head quickly at the splash of a jumping fish,
Peering where the water chuckled over a vanishing water-rat—
And saw not Jack’s familiar form bending over his lines,
And smelt not his vile shag,
We should feel loneliness, a vague impression that something was wrong.

Here the only departures from modern prose form are “and saw not,” “and smelt not,” and the poetical use of “chuckled,” together with the chopping up into lines with capital letters at the beginning, for which it is hard to see the necessity and which reminds us of fancy dress and masquerade. No one will deny that verse 9 is good prose, quite equal to this :—

Let AB be a given straight line,
It is required to describe an equilateral triangle upon it !
From centre A and radius AB describe the circle ABC.
Then from centre B and radius BA
Describe the circle BCD,
Cutting the circle ABC at the point C.
Join AC and CB, and then the triangle ABC
Is the equilateral triangle required !

This, like many advertisements in our papers, has certainly cadence, and to many minds affords pleasure as well as truth, and, as Mr. Pocock asks, “After all, if a poet is not to express himself in his own way, who is to lay down the law and make rules, saying ‘Thus far and no farther’ ?” (The use of the word “poet,” of course, neatly begging the question.) I suppose that what is lacking is not imagination,

for that Euclid and our modern writers of advertisements do possess in a high degree, but fancy and emotion, yet most of us, I should say, would find those essentials also lacking in "Waving aside nebulae of gnats" and the rest of the strophe, which is surely as matter-of-fact as either Wordsworth's :

And still the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell,

or Euclid's first proposition. Mr. Pocock is right that "*vers libre*" is not really a new thing. After it had been buried in the grave of the American Whitman, it was resuscitated as an apt form for the headlines of American newspapers and to advertise patent medicines. I for one cannot agree that if you alter the cadence of such *vers libres* as the New Euclid's or E. V. Lucas's that "the effect is gone." It seems to me that you could alter them indefinitely and still produce the same irritating effect, and that in short the only novelty in them does not concern verse but punctuation. All prose could be printed in this way, *i.e.* making each pause in reading correspond with the end of a line, but such printing, besides being too expensive except for wealthy advertisers, would be intolerably annoying save, perhaps, for rhetoric, which, forming, as it does, the borderland between prose and poetry, uses the language of reason to appeal to our emotions.

"Free" verse, however, is dying because no one reads it except the "*vers-libristes*" themselves, and then chiefly their own. Nothing, for example, is remembered of Walt Whitman's except "Captain, my Captain," and one or two other pieces which somewhat resemble metrical verse. Besides the trick is so easy that anyone can do it, and this is poetic democracy with a vengeance. But the simplest of pragmatic tests should suffice to confute the defenders of *vers libres* as poetry, and that is the question, How is *vers libre* to be distinguished from prose, good or bad? For example, is the following a serious poem in

vers libre, or is it a concoction written in mockery by the present writer ?—

I wonder as I write,
 If you can understand my words,
 And that I would not have
 You think I speak of things
 That are not natural—no !
 Nothing on earth
 Or in the sky
 Is weird,
 All,
 All things,
 Mean naught but what
 Our minds make them ;
 Since matter is the husk
 In which our Spirits hide,
 And Pragmatists are right,
 If what they mean is, things to you
 Are different things to me.

There must be some way of telling ; it may, of course, be a secret confined to a select circle of initiates, but there must be some way.

Verse, furthermore, is, we believe, called “verse” just because it is not free, hence “free verse” is as great an absurdity as “a free strait-waistcoat.” There have been no complaints from the great players, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Keats, and Wordsworth, of the hardship of having rules for the game ; in fact, with the latter they have felt ’twas pastime to be bound.

Mr. Pocock is the first critic to have the courage of his convictions and to include prose in an anthology of poetry, but even he cannot find room for futurist poetry. He says wisely : “All the same no thinking man can refuse to accept their first proposition : that a great change in our emotional life necessitates a change of expression. The whole question is really this : *Have we essentially changed?*” One, of course, retorts the question to an advocate of *vers libre*, What need

is there for it? Why should De Quincey or Dickens be printed as verse?

When a word is in such common use as "poetry" with a connotation that has so many centuries of tradition behind it, it is, we would argue, a profound mistake, a great waste of time and energy to attempt to give it a new connotation in the interests of a new science or philosophy, it being always possible to coin a new term. It is as much a piece of pure pedantry as the modern trick of spelling "Virgil," an English form with a long literary history, with an *e* or as would be spelling "Florence," "*Firenze*."

From time immemorial poetry has connoted words arranged and adapted so as to be chanted or sung, as witness the time-honoured phrase "as the poet sings." "That the holy David's Psalms are a divine poem . . . even the name Psalms will speak for me; which being interpreted is nothing but songs," says Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defense of Poetry*, and later he will write but not inconsistently: "It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet, no more than a long gown maketh an advocate." Both sides agree, of course, that verse does not make poetry but poetry the verse.

Hazlitt, too, seems to hit the mark well when he writes*: "Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line:

Thoughts that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers.

Poetry . . . is the music of language answering to the music of the mind, untying, as it were, 'the secret soul of harmony.' . . . As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins."

Yet Hazlitt, it is true, does later fall into the heresy that, "The Iliad does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation," which, if one remembers what he has just said so convincingly about music, is surely sheer midsummer madness, for nothing can sing less than a literal translation. Here Hazlitt moment-

* In *The English Poets*.

arily forgot what he had learnt from Dr. Johnson : "The special faculty of the poet is that of joining music with reason," or from his master Coleridge : "The man that hath not music in his soul can indeed never be a genuine poet."

Finally, the whole trouble has, in fact, arisen from a deficiency in language noticed first by Aristotle that we have no general name which will include great expression of great thought in prose or verse indifferently. Longinus will use for this the Greek word which is sometimes translated "The Sublime," but for which "Transport" or "Ecstasy" has often been suggested as more fitting. As the word "verse" already exists to describe metrical composition, many modern critics have argued, as we have seen, that the term "poetry" might be employed for the magic touch whether in prose or verse which raises us out of ourselves into some other sphere. As an eloquent critic* of to-day asks : "What shall we require of poetry ? Delight, music, subtlety of thought, a world of the heart's desire, fidelity to comprehensible experience, a glimpse through magic casements, profound wisdom ? All these things—all different, yet not all contradictory—have been required of poetry."

The answer, I think, is contained in the reflection that critics do not, like hermits, postulate a desert but rather an audience of plain men of good will, and that therefore they should, as far as they may, speak a language understood of the people. If the plain man believes and always has believed, and always, I suppose, will believe, that poetry and prose are contradictories, why not let it rest at that ? It is only confusing issues to use poetry in a sense which only critics will understand, and besides, as we could easily show by many examples, such critics when off their guard use the words poetry and prose just as do the rest of God's creation. Let us remember with all our advocacy of free criticism in the twentieth century that preciousness of this kind, or pedantry

* J. Middleton Murry in *Aspects of Literature* (1920), p. 176.

of any kind, is opposed to liberty, and in this case leads to anarchy, which is the worst foe of freedom. The father of modern criticism, Thomas Carlyle, has perhaps in his *Hero as Poet* said the last word: "For my own part, I find considerable meaning in the old vulgar distinction of poetry being *metrical*, having music in it, being a song. . . . If your delineation be authentically *musical*, musical not in word only, but in heart and substance, in all the thoughts and utterances of it, in the whole conception of it, then it will be poetical; if not, not. Musical: how much lies in that! A *musical* thought is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing; detected the inmost mystery of it, namely the *melody* that lies hidden in it. . . . Who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that. . . . Poetry, therefore, we will call *musical thought*."*

This is criticism that one can chew! How much more satisfying than Matthew Arnold's solemn tautology, that poetry is "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty."

The only addition one would care to make to Carlyle's description would be Watts-Dunton's definition. Welding the two we obtain: "Poetry is the concrete and artistic expression of musical thought in emotional and rhythmical language." This, our final definition, will be found to square with the aesthetic teaching of Benedetto Croce that there is no inherent difference between a poet's intuition and his expression, that a poet expresses just as he intuits, and that consequently form is not a mere decoration for the poet's thought. What he expresses, therefore, in music he has intuited *as* music. It agrees too with the sound popular feeling that an artist who has no music in his soul should write prose if he has got thoughts to express and that otherwise, unlike the modern *vers-libristes*, he should remain silent.

* Contrast Dryden's definition of music as "Inarticulate Poetry."

§ 2—POETIC DICTION.

We may now return to the previous question mooted by Wordsworth, viz. Has poetry a language of its own different or differing from prose?

As everyone knows, Wordsworth denied emphatically that there could be any *essential* difference. It is generally believed that Coleridge finally refuted this view in the *Biographia Literaria*, but, as a matter of fact, Coleridge never really touches the question at all. Coleridge discusses first Wordsworth's heresy about "rustic language" which is another question, and one whose absurdity he easily shows; and then in Chap. xviii. when we expect him to deal with it, he discusses instead style and composition, which again is another point, as Wordsworth never argued that prose style and verse *style* were the same.

As Wordsworth took the trouble to italicise the word "essential," one cannot see how anyone can possibly quarrel with so bare a truism. There can be no essential difference in the language, for the fact that poets will use freely archaisms, compound adjectives, tropes, figures, periphrases, etc., and prose-writers less freely, is surely no *essential* difference. The *essential* difference, as Coleridge really shows, lies in the form of metrical composition.

Wordsworth here is flaunting a banner of defiance which his foes, such as Pope, would have cheerfully accepted as their own: Coleridge is valiantly attacking a position which no one has ever defended; so that on this part of the dispute they are both victorious, as they never come into contact.

The question which Wordsworth should have asked and denied from his standpoint was this, Are there any words which are fit and proper in good prose but improper in poetry?

Here is the true ground of debate for classical and romantic. Dr. Johnson in No. 168 of *The Rambler* argued strenuously for the affirmative. After admitting that "No word is naturally

or intrinsically meaner than another," he goes on to show that words alter, become debased, and so may become unfit for the dignity of high poetry. He accuses Shakespeare of impropriety in putting into the mouth of Macbeth in the terrible moment of the murder scene such language as :

*"Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes ;
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, Hold, hold !"*

He says that the adjective "dun" suggests the stable ; that "knife" is a vulgar word suggesting "butcher" or "cook" ; and that "peeping through a blanket" is ludicrous. He admits, however, that his argument will appeal less strongly to a solitary academic than to a modish lady.

What Dr. Johnson says is true enough as far as it goes, but he somewhat unaccountably fails to see that Shakespeare is hardly to be blamed if the words he has used have become debased in the age of his critic, and that to avoid such a fate all writers would perforce have to write in a dead language. Dr. Johnson should have shown that the language used would have been held undignified or ludicrous in Shakespeare's own day, which it was not, any more than it would be so held in our own day again. It is quite possible, however, that we do tolerate "peep through the blanket of the dark" simply because of the authority of Shakespeare's genius, just as we tolerate expressions in the Authorised Version of the Bible which have debased into vulgarisms to-day. Genius creates its own language and has the magic gift of transmitting what has seemed foul, trivial, or ugly into the rare and beautiful. The poet, Dr. Johnson forgot, is ever giving a living face to common clay.

A modern critic would, one feels sure, side with Johnson against Wordsworth, at least if Wordsworth held the position that all words fit and proper in prose are everywhere fit and proper in poetry. The test, of course, is no *a priori* one of

propriety or impropriety but of the effect that the writer himself intends to produce. It is he who provides the criterion and not the critic. If he fails of his effect, say in the pathetic, through using a word or words which rouse laughter or anger, then it would be eminently proper for the most tolerant of twentieth century critics to point out that there is such a thing as proper diction and that an expression which suits admirably colloquial prose may spoil the effect of a prayer, let us say, or of poetry.

If anyone thinks that a laugh at such eighteenth century circumlocutions as "the leathern integuments of his legs," where we should write in prose "leather breeches," settles the question, let him attempt to write serious stanzas introducing half-a-dozen words and phrases which modern usage associates with business or which have developed strong colloquial or slang meanings and yet manage to avoid the ridiculous. A careful writer even of prose with any sense of humour will avoid any phrase that owing to current slang may suggest a ludicrous image. For example, no one to-day would compose a prayer containing such a phrase as "O Thou, the Almighty, who sittest upon the cherubim," as it so ludicrously suggests to us our colloquialism of "sitting upon" mischievous children. Selection is the artist's primary duty, as Coleridge reminded Wordsworth.

§ 3—CLASSICAL METRES AND ENGLISH VERSE.

Owing partly to the influence of the Renaissance in England and the blind admiration for everything classical, and partly owing to the poverty of the English language in rhymes and the dearth of poetical models from the death of Chaucer to the coming of Spenser, it became a fashion in the days of the latter poet to decry rhyming as a barbarous Gothic invention, and to advocate the use of quantitative

classical metres in English poetry. Spenser himself, under the influence of Gabriel Harvey and his pedantic coterie of Cambridge scholars, was for a time bitten with the craze, but luckily for us abandoned it, and gave us instead the rhymes of the *Faerie Queene*.

Spenser found out that, as English when spoken infringes the classical laws of quantity, it cannot obey them when sung, without ceasing to be natural. In our pronunciation stress is the most important feature and overrides quantity. Thus we say "cárpenter," for example, and would describe the first syllable as stressed, the second as slightly stressed, and the third as unstressed. We shift our stress according to the meaning of the word, as in "súbject" and "subjéct." Thus in our verse or prose quantity is practically negligible. If "carpenter" and "subject," on the other hand, were Latin words, the second syllable would be long. Phrases follow the same custom as single words: thus, "boil my egg" will take strong stress on each of the words according to the meaning emphasised. As no one, then, from the days of Spenser to Robert Bridges has succeeded in writing quantitative English verse to the satisfaction of any ear but his own, the question is really dead and buried in a suicide's grave.

The case is otherwise with regard to the possibility of an imitation of classical metres by using stressed and unstressed syllables in the place of their quantitative longs and shorts, calling, for example, "háppily" a dactyl, "boúnding" a trochee, "in the cámp" an anapaest; and so on. We may in this manner, if we are not too particular about minor stresses, write verse that can be read naturally and is not unpleasing (occasionally most pleasing) to the ear. It is difficult to sustain this verse for long owing to our language being overloaded with monosyllables, and owing to the poet being compelled to lay unnatural stress upon them from the exigencies of his metre. The well-known lines:

In the hexámeter rises the fountáin's silvery cólumn,
In the pentámeter áye fálling in mélody báck,

are beautiful enough, but perhaps most beautiful because there are only two verses. Whereas in,

Benedict knew by the hob-nailed shoes it was Basil, the blacksmith,
And by her beating heart Evangeline knew who was with him,

we feel that the measure is forced, and thus such verses grate upon the ear. As Longfellow wished the verse to grate along with the hob-nailed shoes, this verse must be regarded as one of his successes, but in too many instances the emphasis he lays upon unimportant parts of speech like “and” causes cacophony unintended.

Matthew Arnold, discussing the question in his essay “On Translating Homer,” comes to the same conclusion as would a modern pragmatist: “*Solvitur ambulando.*” The objection against hexameters or other measures in the classical style in English “can best be met by *producing* good English hexameters”; and he quotes with approbation some of Dr. Hawtrey’s in translation of Homer. And certainly if such lines as these beautiful ones :

So said she—they long since in Earth’s soft arms were reposing,
There, in their own dear land, their Fatherland, Lacedaemon,

or such poems as Charles Kingsley’s *Andromeda* were common, the question is solved pragmatically for ever.

As what suits the genius of one language or group of languages through some peculiarity which that language or group possesses, is felt to be unidiomatic when transferred to another, we would deduce that such imitations of classical metres are adapted better for translations than for original work. In translations if the writer has a musical ear they do give some flavour of the manner of the classical poets, which has to be omitted wholly from a prose translation, and which becomes something entirely different in the measures that have been found by long experience to suit best the genius of our own language. Such measures are blank verse in iambic pentameter, or rhyming verse. Any other sort of measure is un-English, but may, all the more for that very reason, serve as a

good vehicle of a foreign translation. By using hexameters, pentameters, sapphics, and the like, the translator bespeaks really our indulgence, and is telling us clearly that he is aiming at no originality, but is giving us a translation ; and we welcome the attempt, provided only that he does not boast that he is giving us the *same* metre as the original. This applies most of all to long poems. In a short poem the translator may do more than mere translation ; he may naturalise the original so thoroughly that it may acquire the full rights of a citizen. Thus Cary's *Dante* remains a metic, an Italian in English garb, while Fitzgerald's *Omar*, and Cary's *Heracitus* are as much English as *In Memoriam*.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE MODERN APOSTLES OF FREEDOM.

The practice of Paris and the teachings of Anatole France, that master of clear ironic prose, have had more influence upon literary English prose-writers, reviewers, and critics of the close of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century than have any home writers who do not derive from the French Impressionist School. George Bernard Shaw, George Moore, and G. K. Chesterton, to name but a few of the strongest influences upon modern English prose, have learnt much from Anatole France ; for instance, that peculiar crispness of his, and that bland but deadly air of ironic innocence with which he knows how to clothe his most disconcerting thrusts. (This latter gift is not, of course, peculiar to Anatole France, but he is the greatest master of it since the days of its first great exponents, his masters, Rabelais and Voltaire : in fact, it is a French rather than English characteristic, although two great Englishmen, Chaucer and Swift, both knew the trick and used it well.)

Systems of criticism have, however, never flourished in England, but since E. S. Dallas in 1866 gallantly attempted in *The Gay Science* to establish a system of scientific criticism and, after writing two volumes, had to abandon his purpose, we have had two writers who have laid the groundwork for a method of free scientific criticism. These critics are Dr. Richard G. Moulton in the Introduction to his *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (1st edition 1885), and Mr. John M. Robertson in his *Essays Towards a Critical Method*, and in "The Theory and Practice of Criticism" contained in his *New Essays* (1897). Messrs. Moulton and

Robertson (who was writing criticism before 1885) are on the side of the free spirit, and in some ways anticipate Jules Lemaître and Anatole France. Dr. Saintsbury, too, in all his published critical work, and especially in his masterpiece, *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, has always vindicated against all comers a sane liberty, the deadly foe of licence on the one side or of authoritative pedantry on the other. Each of these writers has exercised influence upon the present generation, but possibly less widely than he has deserved.

Dr. Richard Moulton, while not denying all utility to judicial criticism, pleads that it cannot be scientific. The reason of the long reign of judicial criticism, which he finds to be a reign of confusion and unnecessary strife, was that it preceded the establishment of the spirit of modern science. If criticism is to be a science at all, it will have to be founded, as is every science (another name for "organised thought"), upon inductive principles. Scientific criticism for him, then, is inductive criticism, induction being the most practical method of organisation, and using *a priori* methods for side-lights only. The progress of all science is, therefore, he argues, bound up in the inductive method.

This, of course, is true, but it is not a complete statement of the whole truth, unless we ever keep in mind that the deductive method is the necessary complement of induction which is left hanging in the air, and necessarily incomplete without the services of its older sister. We may collect as many instances and examples as we can, and classify them as much as we like, but we cannot go a step forward or reach a temporary halting-place or conclusion without the aid of deduction. All modern sciences start with induction for the inquiry, and end with deduction for their teaching.

Dr. Moulton next dismisses the idea of "value" from his inductive criticism which knows nothing about "higher" or "lower," as such terminology of value lies outside the domain of science. Here, I fancy, Dr. Saintsbury would agree, and

Mr. Robertson would disagree. Dr. Moulton's pronouncement contains, of course, a valuable caveat, and is illustrated by a contrast between the judicial and the inductive methods respectively of discussing Ben Jonson's work as of "lower" value than Shakespeare's, and as being responsible for the "decay" of the drama. But is the pronouncement true for all sciences? We can see that for the geologist a diamond is a geological specimen of no higher value than a piece of coal, but what about the political economist? For the chemist the stomach of a fly is not lower in value than that of a man, but to a biologist do not the terms "lower" and "higher" convey scientific meaning? Once the idea of "life" or "development" comes into a science, then, it would seem, the idea of "value," of "lower" or "higher" also enters. We see this in ethics where, even in the most empirical system, the ideas of "higher" and "lower" have to be used. As Mr. Robertson puts it: *If the proposition be "Flaubert is a greater artist than Feydeau" . . . we are approaching a kind of proposition of which it may be scientifically said that its acceptance or rejection is to be explained in terms of greater or less psychological development or culture.* That is, a higher or a lower value.

In Mr. Robertson's pregnant phrase just quoted we have, I think, the solution to the chief objection brought to bear against subjective criticism. The subjective critic is asked, As everything with you is purely relative and, as tastes notoriously differ at all times and in all places, what is to be your criterion of high value or low value, some value or no value?

Now, who shall arbitrate?

Ten men love what I hate,

Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;

Ten, who in ears and eyes

Match me: we all surmise,

They, this thing, and I that; whom shall my soul believe?

Browning had no difficulty in answering the ethical riddle; and the subjective critic would answer the critical riddle in a

similar way by indicating the higher curve that sociology traces to mark progress in thought and culture :

Look not thou down but up
To uses of a cup !

A South-Sea Islander may find beauty in what would be for us an uncouth image, but our circle of beauty contains his circle and much more, because our thoughts and our culture have progressed beyond his stage and contain it and much more. Not that there is continuous progress in civilisation or aesthetic appreciation, but the higher curve wherever found in whatever place or age contains the lower in its sweep.

The next point of importance made by Dr. Moulton is that the judicial method is defended, and wrongly defended, on the score that it relies on taste or "condensed experience."

As our critic finds room for the judicial method alongside his inductive system, we can see no reason why a believer in the subjectivity of criticism should reject a judicial system founded not upon *a priori* canons but upon that taste which results from "condensed experience." But Dr. Moulton finds a flaw in the reasoning. He says that "it omits to take into account that the judicial attitude of mind is itself a barrier to appreciation, as being opposed to that delicacy of receptiveness which is a first condition of sensibility to impressions of literature and art."

A modern will agree wholeheartedly with the majority of the positions in Prof. Moulton's truly admirable book, but yet may be pardoned for thinking that his chain of reasoning has here got into a sorry tangle.

"A judicial frame of mind" is surely the best possible frame of mind for any appreciation that is worth the name. For an inductive method a judicial frame of mind, one would think, would be a *primary* qualification. Although a judge may be forced to condemn a criminal, yet, if he has the truly judicial frame of mind he will be the first to recognise the merit of an act of bravery or self-sacrifice. A judicial frame of mind implies attentiveness and knowledge of what is before one :

a non-judicial frame of mind too often implies inattentiveness, slackness, sleepiness. A listener half-asleep at a concert and not quite certain that he was not in a spinning-mill would we submit possess the non-judicial frame of mind, but would not the more on that account be a sympathetic inductive critic of the music at the concert.

But argues Dr. Moulton : " Now a judicial attitude of mind is highly unreceptive, for it necessarily implies a restraint of sympathy : Everyone, remarks Hogarth, is a judge of painting except the connoisseur. The judicial mind has an appearance of receptiveness, because it seeks to shut out prejudice ; but what if the idea of judging be itself a prejudice ? "

Here again we would dispute the question-begging adverb " necessarily." A judicial attitude of mind is not inconsistent with sympathy of which any humanity worth the name can rarely divest itself even when it puts on the judicial robes.

Perhaps, as Dr. Saintsbury has already so wisely said, too great emphasis has been laid in late years by writers of criticism upon the idea of " sympathy." Unless the connotation of the term be limited so as to exclude the flabby melting mood its use is harmful to criticism. Dr. Johnson, for instance, is not an example of an unsympathetic critic, but he could not abide what he thought to be clotted nonsense, and even where we may think he thought wrong, how can we condemn him ? Dr. Saintsbury draws attention to " the popularity in late years of the *singularly uncritical* words ' sympathetic ' and ' unsympathetic ' in describing criticism," and adds in true Dryden style : " It would seem impossible for a large number of persons to ' like ' otherwise than ' grossly ' in Dryden's sense, or to imagine that anyone else can like delicately, with discrimination, in the old sense ' nicely.' A ' sympathetic ' notice or criticism is one which pours unmixed cataracts of what the cooks call oiled butter all over the patient ; a notice that questions this part of him, rejects that, but gives due value to the gold and silver and the precious stones, while discarding the hay and the stubble is ' unsympathetic.' "

But Dr. Moulton's chief fallacy is, I think, that he will insist in going to the law-courts for his judge and his judicial frame of mind, where a judge of tobacco or of wine would, as we have seen in a previous chapter, give us a better analogy. What greater sympathy and what more judicial frame of mind would Dr. Moulton require than that of his rustic compatriot famed in legend, who pronounced that reasoned and inductive judgment, "All whiskies are good ! Some are better than others !"

As for Hogarth's *obiter dictum*, I wonder if there is anything in it after all, or if it is not just a momentary lapse into stupidity of a great man—*Aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus*. If "connoisseur" means "a competent judge" (and it has that connotation for Pope), Hogarth made the curious statement that everyone is a judge except a competent judge. But the truth is that Hogarth was one of the greatest of literary artists, though not with the pen.

And finally, "if the idea of judging be itself a prejudice," then we must not be allowed even to choose between giving our time and attention to one work of art rather than to another, nor to exercise as much choice as we would for a country walk. Here again Dr. Moulton is in the name of liberty more rigid than the systems which he condemns.

In the next part of his Essay he shows, taking examples from the history of our own literature, the failure of critics in the past. His task is an easy one, as the history of all navigation is strewn with wrecks, although vessels have navigated rich freights into port. We do not think that our critic has given sufficient emphasis to the latter picture. In fact, he goes so far as to write, "As a set-off in the opposite scale *only one* considerable achievement is to be noted," and that the quenching by Macaulay of the light of Robert Montgomery. His conclusion is that critical works where inductive retain their force, and where judicial are obsolete. He instances the immortality of Aristotle's criticism where inductive, the success of Dr. Johnson's criticism of metaphysical poetry, and of

Addison's of *Paradise Lost*. This seems true but not to be the whole truth.

I am inclined to suspect that one or two fallacies lurk here. In the first place Dr. Moulton seems to lack the sympathy, which he deems requisite for the critic, in his own criticism of the judicial critics of the past. He does, it is true, atone for it later, but one seems to find it missing here. Dr. Saintsbury is always generous, and if in his great work we are told with sorrow of the wrecks, we also find most ungrudging appreciation of the noble cargoes which many goodly vessels did bring to port. Contrast, for example, Saintsbury's generous dealings* with the great Cham of judicial criticism and the more grudging methods both of Matthew Arnold and Dr. Moulton: "On the whole, it may be safely said that, however widely a man may differ from Johnson's critical theory, he will, provided that he possesses some real tincture of the critical spirit himself, think more and more highly of the *Lives of the Poets* the more he reads them, and the more he compares them with the greater classics of critical literature." And Saintsbury then proceeds* to write three glorious pages of criticism upon Johnson, in which the latter's greatness receives true homage, and the success rather than the failure of his judicial criticism is emphasised. If, as Moulton postulates, sympathy makes the critic, then, owing to the great number of such sympathetic judgments, Dr. George Saintsbury is the greatest of modern English critics. I do not doubt that he is, but it is owing to the blending in him, the judicious seasoning of the oil of sympathy with a good dash of the vinegar of homely common-sense.

Secondly, Dr. Moulton never seems to suspect that the judicial criticism which has erred in the past, or which seems to have erred, has proceeded quite as often on inductive principles as otherwise. An inductive method may lead to

* See his *History of English Criticism*, p. 226, *seq.*

right results, to wrong results, to mixed results, to no results. Induction is as old as the human race, in fact older, as other animals use with greater or less success processes of induction and still remain other animals and imperfect critics. An inductive astrologer again is not necessarily more scientific than a deductive one. No one has ever argued on purely deductive *a priori* principles that a sonnet must have exactly fourteen lines, though a lunatic of genius might yet do so : an argument of such a kind would to-day be of inductive form, and whether a complete or incomplete induction is a matter of taste and definition. It has been argued deductively from considerations of balance that a play requires three or five divisions to possess completeness of form (the beginning, middle, and end, that Aristotle postulates for every work of art). The argument being deductive is stronger than the purely empirical inductive argument would be, and is far more useful, as it would lead us to suspect that a play, which did not contain the triple division (Desis, Climax, Lysis) or the quintuple (Introduction, Desis, Climax, Lysis, Catastrophe) which is really the same, is a torso and not a complete art product. In the same way, if we could show by deduction the necessity for caesura in verse, our minds would be more content than they are with the purely empirical and pragmatic induction that caesura pays.

As we have said, the inductive method may lead of itself to results as displeasing to Dr. Moulton and all right-minded moderns as the most judicial of deductions. Let us take, for example, any of the "horrid examples" of the early reviewers' treatment of Keats and of Shelley, or of the Lake School. Take the *Edinburgh Review* for October, 1802, with its ominous opening, "Poetry has this much in common with religion that its standards were fixed long ago, etc." This at first sight, with its preposterous axiom in the forefront of its offending, would seem to promise a furious cannonade conducted on lines of purely judicial criticism, especially as the reviewer continues to talk of Mr. Southey's having "been

brought before us for judgment," and of "our inquisitorial office." But our "conscientious inquisitor" like the majority of conscientious inquisitors proceeds on purely inductive and scientific lines. He first enumerates the sources from which the Lakists derive their materials : (1) The anti-social principles of Rousseau ; (2) the simplicity and energy of Kotzebue and Schiller ; (3) the homeliness and harshness of Cowper interchanged occasionally with the innocence of Ambrose Philips, or the quaintness of Quarles and Dr. Donne.

There is not much that is unscientific about the procedure, and as, at this distance, we, too, can see the faults of the romantic school as clearly as they saw the faults of their predecessors, our poetic withers are unwrung when the writer proceeds to damn *Thalaba*.

We, too, damn *Thalaba*, but in a gentler, more discriminating manner as becomes our less boisterous age : we damn it with faint praise, but it remains damned.

The reviewer continues, using the inductive method as freely as the judicial, to attack the views of Wordsworth upon poetic diction and the poetic effusions and wicked revolutionary teachings of Southey and his friends. Much of the criticism is admittedly ludicrous and false, the tone is everywhere detestable, and although much of the criticism hits the target if not always in the gold, yet we cannot find either here or in the similar reviews of the period the truth of Prof. Moulton's dictum that "Critical works where inductive retain their force, where judicial have become obsolete" (p. 16).

On the contrary again, many judicial reviews even when harsh in tone deserve to live on account of their essential justness, and the good service which they rendered to the poets criticised. Our strong modern prejudices in favour of Keats make us resent, and rightly, the cruelty of the tone of the adverse reviewers, but worshipping Keats this side of idolatry we admit that many of the strictures upon *Endymion* and his earlier and weaker verse were just, and not substantially different from views expressed by Shelley, Byron,

or even by Keats himself, and that the poet benefited from them, as his later work clearly shows. In the same way Christopher North's rough handling of Tennyson, although it lacked urbanity and resulted in silencing for some years the poet's song, did exercise a most invigorating effect upon Tennyson's muse, and gave strength to a sweetness that too often candied into a morbid effeminacy.

"Exquisite as are the beauties, intoxicating as is the atmosphere of *Endymion*, no one nowadays could pronounce it free from faults of taste of more kinds than one, or deny that as, after all, it holds itself out to be a story, the demand for some sort of intelligible narrative procession is not so irrelevant as when it is put to a lyric. . . . And the critics were justified of their victims. Coleridge and Tennyson altered into perfection the poems which had been so imperfect. Southey added rhyme and better rhythm in *Kehama*; Keats grew from the incoherence of *Endymion*, and its uncertain taste, to the perfection of *Lamia* and the great *Odes* and the *Eves* of St. Agnes and St. Mark" (Saintsbury *loc. cit.* p. 423).

Holding as we do to-day the principle of relativity in aesthetic criticism, we can see where the thrusts of Dr. Moulton at the judicial critics fall wide of the mark. A piece of particular criticism may be "true" in and for the eighteenth century, "not true" in and for the nineteenth, and possibly "true" again in and for the twentieth. We may believe that some criticisms based on axiomatic *a priori* laws are true for all centuries *sub specie aeternitatis*: for example, that human nature being essentially the same at all times (though Schiller and the Humanists have denied this) a poet like Chaucer or Shakespeare, when he deals with essential humanity, are "universal poets," poets of the centre, "not of an age but for all time." But criticism rarely plumbs so deep. It speaks subjectively from the standpoint of its age, country, environment; and evaluates the ratio of the artist's "*moment*" and "*milieu*" to the same factors in the public he addresses. It may then pronounce the judicial

criticism, "This will never do!" of the *Excursion* of a Wordsworth, and it may thus shock those sympathetic souls, who say that you must not use such a formula as "This will never do!" and that such criticism will never do. It may then be found out after all by the pragmatist critic that as a matter of fact *The Excursion* "never did," though, of course, it may yet do.

It can not be sufficiently borne in mind that even the greatest of artists who writes for all time must, as the whole includes the part, write also for his age. It is, we should say, only when a slighted artist has not been able to reach the special circle of his own age who have ears for his message, that we may affirm the possibility of his being, in spite of the neglect or obloquy of his contemporaries, one of these supreme artists. For example, the case of Blake might be, although we think not, a case in point. We doubt if in literature there is an instance of a writer being known to his age and unhesitatingly and universally condemned by it, and yet afterwards being held to belong to the highest class, unless perhaps as with Keats, he died too young to reach his audience—and Keats was not unhesitatingly condemned. The reverse, of course, has happened time and again, that the idols of one age, the Pomfrets or the Cowleys, are later dethroned with ignominy.

And this illustrates the truth of a previous remark to the effect that history, which is the wider collection of subjective criticisms, corrects the personal and local equation of the particular subjective criticisms of any one country or epoch. If a poet writes for his own age, it may be at the same time true that he is the supreme poet for that age, and yet not the supreme poet or even a respectable poet for other times or all time. Consequently, the criticism which apparently placed Beaumont and Fletcher above Shakespeare is not necessarily false criticism. And in fact "true" and "false" cannot be applied to a criticism until we know the critic's universe of discourse. If, for example, an age sets a high value upon,

let us say, "poetic diction," then a poet is limited by that restriction, and a critic must make "poetic diction" part at least of his universe of criticism. If another age demands the "horrible" in drama then Shakespeare must write a *Hamlet* and Webster a *Duchess of Malfi*, and will be supremely great with the former if they can mould to their own the desire of their age, not as with Kyd mould themselves wholly into their age, nor on the other hand with Jonson endeavour to break the mould of their age.

Dr. Moulton, in advocating the inductive method in criticism does, of course, see that truths so discovered will be purely relative, but he does not himself always remember this fact when he is criticising inductively the judicial critic of the past. Yet he himself by no means wishes to exile the judicial critic from the Republic of Letters, but welcomes him, as long as the latter remembers that his method has nothing whatever to do with modern scientific criticism but is an expression of his own views, a creation as much as is the work of the man about whom he is writing. Reviews, he adds, based on taste "may be regarded almost as the lyrics of prose." "Scientific criticism and the criticism of taste have distinct spheres ; and the whole of literary history shows that the failure to keep the two separate results only in mutual confusion."

We think it would be more scientific to add that past criticism, which we think false, may often be only relatively false, or false as regards ourselves, and that past criticism which has proved to be false has arisen quite as often from an error in the inductive process as in the faultiness of the taste. The spirit of the age in modern criticism would seem to feel first that the methods of science may lead men astray (*e.g.* Taine, Hennequin, as Brunetière demonstrated, and later Brunetière himself, when he took over Hennequin's methods) if they do not bring to their task that taste, connoisseurship, or judicial frame of mind which science itself demands. Secondly, that the education of your men of taste, of your future Hazlitts, Lambs, and Anatole Frances may be helped considerably by

the principles of inductive criticism for which Dr. Moulton so eloquently pleads.

No exception, we think, can be taken to the constructive, that is the major portion of Prof. Moulton's Essay. He shows, as does Mr. J. M. Robertson, in his "Theory and Practice of Criticism," that the relativity of criticism does not debar scientific treatment. He lays down as a rule for criticising particular works that for the critic "there is no court of appeal except to the literary works themselves," and that we can have no *a priori* appeals to taste. True, taste proves nothing, it only guides. And he recognises the validity of the contention that we have cited from Anatole France, when he writes : "It is not the objective details but the subjective impressions they produce that make literary effect. The objective details are the *limit* on the variability of the subjective impressions." Taking criticism of the character of Macbeth as an example, he says that the best criticism is that which is consistent with the facts of the play. "*Interpretation in literature is of the nature of a scientific hypothesis, the truth of which is tested by the degree of completeness with which it explains the details of the literary work as they actually stand.*"

This is pure pragmatism and Anatole France and all pragmatists would accept it ; the former probably contenting himself to point out that after all "facts" and "details" are unknown in themselves but are themselves subjective. The killing of Duncan by Macbeth is a "fact" but till we interpret its relationships it is of no value. Facts are what we make of them, and a fact in isolation, if such can be imagined, is to all intents nothing. "The details of the literary work as they actually stand" will mean the relationships of facts as generally admitted, and that is, as we have pointed out before, the appeal to history, the supreme court in pragmatic philosophy. Completeness and consistency is then Moulton's test for the value of interpretation of literature.

This, too, is the final sum of the critical doctrine of John M. Robertson. For him criticism is a way of teaching and

the science is to be found in the consistency of our literary estimates. Consistency, he argues, is the criterion of the truth of logical propositions, and harmony the criterion of beauty : a twofold consistency, logical and aesthetic, is, therefore, the test of rightness in criticism. The first requisite for a science is a comparison of judgments and an endeavour to find some greatest common measure. It is the business of a critic to examine judgments in this way, and, if he does not agree with them, to be able at least to account for them, endeavouring always to discount the personal equation of himself and his predecessors in criticism, that comes from the personal bias, from which no man may escape, which arises from age, tastes, religion or non-religion, in a word human environment.

Here both Moulton and Robertson give us the completest expression we have yet had in English literature of the modern spirit of criticism. The practical expression of it will be found *passim* in the critical work of such moderns as Sir Walter Raleigh, John Bailey Lascelles Abercrombie, Robert Lynd, J. Middleton Murry, and most of our younger writers of literary criticism. The same spirit of free inquiry will be found to underlie the newest style of biography and autobiography inaugurated in England by Ethel Smythe and Lytton Strachey, which though only a few years old already promises to be the most fruitful plant of twentieth century critical literature.

Dr. Saintsbury's masterpiece, the "*History of Criticism*," traces the genesis of the modern spirit and is its greatest pæan. He shows how Aristotle and Longinus, to mention the two greatest names in ancient criticism, were in so many ways filled with the modern free spirit ; how Dryden's essential greatness had the same basis ; how Pope and Dr. Johnson are often surprisingly prophetic ; how Coleridge, Arnold, and Pater complete the work of their long line of predecessors.

"*Feel ; discover the source of feeling ; express the discovery so as to communicate the feeling ; this can be done in every*

case. *And if it cannot be done by every person, why, that is only equivalent to saying that it is not precisely possible for everyone to be a critic.*" Such is Saintsbury's summing up of Pater's way of criticism and he adds that he does not know a better.

Having dealt with the three chief modern English writers upon criticism regarded as a system, we might now proceed to discuss some objections to critical pragmatism. We will then conclude by summing up the matter as a modern sees it.

CHAPTER · VII.

THE PRAGMATIC METHOD, SOME OBJECTIONS.

Objections have been taken, and to my mind rightly taken, to the Pragmatic Method of Literary Criticism on account of the unguarded expressions of some modern writers. Thus Dr. Richard Moulton in the document of Pragmatism, which we have had under review in the previous chapter, tells us that each author is a separate species (p. 32)—“ Wordsworth has laid down that each fresh poet is to be tried by fresh canons of taste : this is only another way of saying that the differences between poets are differences of kind, that each author is a ‘ school ’ by himself, and can be appreciated only by a receptive attitude formed by adjustment to himself alone.” Schiller in his *Formal Logic*, in attacking the Formal Logician’s treatment of “ species,” also asserts that for the pragmatist each individual is a species in itself.

Pragmatists, who write like this, are in their excess of zeal, it appears to me, exaggerating a truth ; or erecting, what should be after all a mere *caveat*, into a general proposition. It is, of course, well to bear in mind that any particular author *may* turn out to be a species by himself, but it seems ridiculous to go so far as to say that every author is *sui generis*. This would destroy all Literary Criticism truly so-called. The claim of Wordsworth and of Schiller would destroy all science, for the main work of science is, after all, classification, and, if every individual is to be raised into a class by himself, the object of classification is defeated. The suggestion seems to me as useful as would be a similar suggestion for the biologist, to consider each individual domestic cat on account of its undoubted individual differences as a separate species of cat

or of animal. A warning useful to the owner of a cat, but useless to a scientist.

The dangers in literary criticism, which this sweeping claim is meant to obviate, are sufficiently met, it is clear, by the pragmatic critic's doctrine, that every work of art must be judged by the standard which the author has chosen and not by any which the critic may choose. Thus, if a poet writes us a Miltonic sonnet, it is ridiculous to ask a critic, "Why drag Milton in?" when it is the author who has already implicitly done so. It would be absurd here to argue that such a poet is a class by himself.

If a poet invents a new form, then until he has followers, this new form would, of course, be considered as a sub-species or class apart, but even then it may not be, as one might think, a purely isolated phenomenon, as it might be subsumed under some wider species or genus, *e.g.* a thirteen-line sonnet being treated as a sub-species of sonnet the species, of lyric the genus.

The corollary, which Dr. Moulton draws from his too wide statement, is that for the scientific inductive critic there can be no such thing as order of merit, and this deduction likewise is far too wide. It is, of course, a commonplace of criticism that only a very callow undergraduate arranges poets in order of merit, first, second, and third. As Professor Moulton puts it, "Preferences and comparisons of merit must be kept rigidly outside the sphere of science." And yet in spite of everything I am inclined to think that this is nonsense. Even the geologist (whom Professor Moulton cites) does know order of merit. If I consult this geological critic about the amount of gold present in two pieces of gold-bearing quartz and one piece of old red sandstone, and ask him to arrange them for me in order of merit, he would not be likely, I think, to answer me in the haughty tones of Dr. Moulton, "Science knows nothing of competitive examination."

It is the same in poetry. It is true, to paraphrase Dr. Moulton, that a scientific critic is not heard extolling the sonnet as a model formation or making sarcastic comments upon

the Pindaric ode, but he will try to compare the amount of poetic gold present respectively in two particular sonnets. That is his business, and he has his own way of performing his task and of convincing us that the results of his expertise are morally certain. If this is not true, then we have been wrong in condemning poor Martin Tupper. Dr. Moulton would answer, I know, that an inductive critic would not condemn Martin Tupper any more than a geologist condemns old red sandstone: he would regard Tupper as an interesting phenomenon, and give us all the facts about his work, and then pass on. I reply that in doing so he has condemned him, for, if he has done his work competently, he has assigned him to the old red sandstone formation and out of the class of gold-bearing rock. So that neither the inductive critic, nor the geologist, nor any scientist can escape from the judicial method, which is, as we have tried to establish, a necessary concomitant of all science.

Once a standard of reference is set up judicial criticism enters. Classification for the pragmatist is for human ends and involves a standard of reference. Nature has established the natural class "dog," and here, of course, there can be no order of merit, a poodle not being more or less doggy than a mastiff. For human ends man may want the class "watch-dog," and here enters at once a standard of reference, and an order of merit, and that not only between classes but between individuals. We do expect the canine critic to be able to pronounce some such judgment as this, "The Airedale terrier is a better watchdog than the Dachshund, yet this particular Dachshund Fritz is a better watchdog than Jock the Airedale."

If the term "poetry" has any meaning at all, we are entitled to say that Homer has more of the essential qualities which make up the connotation of poetry than has Walt Whitman, let us say, though as men in Nature's primary division they are, of course, equal. If the term "ode" has a definite connotation, we may also fruitfully compare Cowley with Gray and institute an order of merit. We cannot, of course, compare

things of different species except on the ground of some common agreement. We cannot, for example, compare a dog with a cat except on the ground, say, of rat-catching ; nor an Elizabethan tragedy with a Greek tragedy except on the ground of psychology and the like. But we always will as human beings, and must as critics, compare things of the same class ; and institute, as far as our power permits, some order of merit. If Dr. Moulton's inductive criticism will not allow him to say that Milton's sonnet on his Blindness is not of higher merit than that on *Tetrachordon* for the reasons which Professor Moulton could give more convincingly than I, then his induction would be singularly fruitless criticism.

Another corollary attached by the writer mentioned to this question about order of merit is the ever-living ground of debate, *Art for Art's sake*. Dr. Moulton writes that the critic as such has nothing to do with morality, which lies outside inductive treatment, though intrinsically more important. We have already given reasons for disputing this standpoint. We have argued that Criticism, like the Art which it criticises, is a social product, and so concerns always society as a whole and not the individual. We would even go further and say that *all* sciences have a social implication, and that a scientist may have even as scientist to pronounce a social or moral judgment. Thus for a chemist we know that nitroglycerine is no less moral than soothing-syrup, and that as an analyst he will give us a passionless analysis of either ; but he may be asked still as chemist or expert witness in a court of law about the probable danger to society attendant on the indiscriminate use of either ; and he would certainly merit a stern rebuke if he priggishly answered, Chemistry knows nothing of social values or moral implications.

Dr. Moulton instances the geographer, whose interest in the tropical zone is no whit the less because its enervating climate may enfeeble the moral character ; and the political economist who, he says, rightly ignores the human drama of starvation and misery. Agreed, but is this the whole truth ? Does the

geographer cease to be geographer when he becomes aware of the fact that even geography may contain a moral problem, and that he may be asked purely as geographical expert to afford us some guidance on the problem. Is not Dr. Moulton's idea of Political Economy that of the old Early-Victorian Laissez-Faire school now dead and so rightly damned, just because it did hold that Economics could be treated *in vacuo*, and that the human equation should not count. We would submit, on the contrary, that there is hardly a science in the world—not even pure Mathematics—which has not at some point or other to consider the social implication. And how much more Criticism of the Fine Arts in which man expresses himself, in which he tries to find full expression of himself as a social animal! If man were an insect, we could conceive an Unmoral Criticism; morality has nothing, for example, to do with a bee's activities. But once the human element enters in, morality must enter at once along with it: once a bee-hive is considered as human property, then the moral question may arise about the proximity of the bee-hive to a public road or a neighbour's garden.

It is well to emphasise this point, because those who take the opposite view are a strong body and use strong language—"bourgeois," "Philistine," "Pharisee," and "prude" being their weakest epithets for their opponents.

Let it be said clearly that those who hold that Art cannot be separated in practice from Morality need not necessarily hold Early-Victorian or prudish views about Art; nor do they necessarily advocate the infallibility of some Zeal-of-the-Land Busy or Tartufe or of some British Stage Censor. They merely hold this point of view, that, if it is clear that a work of art conveys a message hostile to social health, a critic is justified in holding it to be artistically bad simply and solely because art is primarily a social product. If the social function of art is no axiom, then, of course, the conclusion is false. In the same way a jury of anatomists might hold that considered in itself the murderer's stroke argued wonderful skill and unerring know-

ledge of human anatomy, but, as it cannot be considered in itself and without reference to society, this artist must be condemned and hang. The Art-for-Art's sake fanatic could pour pages of eloquent invective upon such a jury and could quote De Quincey to some effect:—"Murders have their little differences and shades of merit, as well as statues, pictures, oratorios, cameos, intaglios, or what not. . . . A golden mean is certainly what every man should aim at. . . . I find it difficult to maintain that steady equatorial line between the two poles of too much murder on the one hand and too little on the other. I am too soft. . . . This vulgar *goût de comparaison*, as La Bruyère calls it, will be our ruin; each work has its own separate characteristics—each in and for itself is incomparable." And this, I humbly submit, is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the plea, "Art for Art's sake!" I have dealt at some length here and before with Dr. Moulton's work in no hostile spirit (regarding, in fact, this work as the best exposition in our own generation of the pragmatic system), but because his views have, in my experience and humble opinion, misled students of literary criticism either through over-statement, or, as in this last instance, through error. No student, however, can afford to neglect the admirable introduction to *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, nor is its value lessened, if this present essay be read as a possible corrective written from another viewpoint of Pragmatic Criticism.

What all moderns will without cavil agree with wholeheartedly are these positions:

- (i) That the inductive process, though not criticism, is a useful propaedeutic to the critic, and first-aid to the reviewer.
- (ii) That difference of kind is of greater importance to the critic than difference of degree.
- (iii) "That inductive criticism is mainly occupied in distinguishing literary species."
- (iv) "That literature is a thing of development."

We would add to (ii) the rider, with which Dr. Moulton apparently does not agree, that

- (v) Other things being equal, criticism does take note of quantitative elements.

Thus, for example, it is not, we think, foolish to say that on account of its greater difficulty an epic or a tragedy must be reckoned as of higher merit and greater importance than a sonnet, or that the best miniature painter must give precedence to a Michael Angelo. This, I fear, Dr. Moulton would reckon as a peculiarly bad example of the foolishness of the old judicial criticism, but, I think, that the modern critic, however free, does not (in fact, cannot) revolt against the "laws" which a pragmatist discovers, if his common sense convinces him that they do exist.

A final objection to Pragmatic Criticism might, it occurs to me, be formulated in this way, Are you not, after all, freeing the critic at the expense of the artist? The artist is to be tied while the critic remains free!

My answer would, I think, take some such form as the following considerations about Art viewed from the pragmatic standpoint.

Every artist, whatever his art, has to correlate two things, first, some concrete embodiment of his particular message and, secondly, an audience. The aim of a musician is to express his emotions in the language of music in such a way that an audience will feel similar emotions according to its capacity and the sympathy he can arouse, and will wish to have the experience repeated.

A stage dramatist wishes to tell a tale and create the illusion of real life by means of living actors, and rouse the interest and curiosity of an audience to such an extent as to keep them for two or three hours unwilling to leave a cramped posture in an uncomfortable seat.

"Equivocations in dramatic art," writes Jacinto Benavente, the great modern Spanish dramatist and pragmatic critic in his *Table Talk*, "invariably end in an empty house and in one

more equivocation, that the play failed because it was art, and the public is unable to appreciate art. But the true art of the theatre is to do good business, and to do good business you must do good art. Shakespeare and Molière were both good managers, and as managers made a good deal of money."

A novelist's task is to tell a tale and create the illusion of real life in such a way by his words as to rouse the interest and curiosity of his readers, to keep them from being bored, and induce them to buy and read another book by the same hand. A lyric poet has to rouse the emotions of his readers by the expression of his own emotions in the verbal rhythm and music which accompanied his feelings at the time or his recollection of them, and in such a way as to induce his readers to wish the experiment to be repeated.

One aim common to all artists is to avoid boring audience or spectators. In the long run and at the right times and places good work never bores.

An artist will choose his audience, and may be popular or unpopular. A true critic is he who is at home in any audience. The popular artist must be simple and forcible; the unpopular artist may deliberately address a complex message to a small audience of special tastes and culture, but the circle of his hearers may be widened by the teaching and propaganda of qualified interpreters otherwise called critics. It is ridiculous for critics or other admirers of an artist to complain of his limited appeal, when perhaps, as with George Meredith, at all events after the publication of *The Egoist*, he appealed, like Walter Savage Landor, deliberately to a select few; or, as with Blake, both his thought and expression of it are too complex for the simple-minded reader of good-will. Browning said of himself that he did not intend his writings to be a substitute for a cigar, an easy method of soothing tired nerves, and implied that hard mental effort would be needed to achieve the reward for the soul which was to be found at the end of the work. One feels uneasily that

Shakespeare, the deeper psychologist, would have been less haughty.

Simplicity is not in itself a virtue, as it is a quality shared by Shakespeare and Martin Tupper, but the power of making the complex simple and arousing sympathetic interest is the special mark of every teacher of the first rank. Keats unmistakably has this power as a constant gift ; Shelley unmistakably has it less often ; Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer always ; Browning sometimes ; Blake more rarely. The great artist is the patient teacher who has the great gift or takes the immense trouble to put complex feelings or thoughts in a simple way. A lesser artist, but still great, is he who can put simple thoughts and feelings in a complex way of beauty, whether by verbal melodies, musical chords, wonderful colour schemes, or subtle interlacings of sculptured stone.

A minor artist is one who aims low and hits his mark consistently, or one who at times, but not for long, produces great effects.

The bad artist is he who through lowness of aims, insincerity of message, or sheer inability to deliver it, is found wearisome in the long run by those to whom he has made appeal. The critic is, or ought to be, a man of good taste and keen susceptibility, whose endeavour it is to widen the circle of a good but unpopular artist, or to diminish the circle of a bad artist who is injuring the souls of his admirers. His function it is to fulfil the dual rôle of a mission preacher and also special constable in the realm of art. As he has to be an artist himself in his own secondary art, his work will also be judged in the same way as is that of other artists : if he bores his own audience, he is a bad critic.

POPULARITY AS CRITERION.

Pragmatic criticism has everything in its favour, and it has this to its credit that it kills for ever the odious pretensions of the superior person for whom popularity is the cardinal vice.

Dickens is popular, therefore he is bad ; Meredith is unpopular, therefore he is good. " You can deceive some of the people all the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot deceive all the people all the time," was the homely pragmatic rendering by the greatest American of the famous Old World thought "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum.*" Popularity is no criterion, it may be either good or bad ; permanence is the criterion, and it rests on certain qualities which also make for popularity. The experiencing mind of the critic hunts for those qualities in the temporary popular or unpopular. He has history to guide him, and he has to search for the true Attic salt which alone keeps the works of man from decay.

Pope was popular till he produced his really great work for which he is popular to-day ; Keats was unpopular in his own day and is popular to-day ; Shelley, despite what his admirers have attempted to do for him, has never formed a popular cult ; the popularity of Robert Montgomery was killed by a single article ; Dickens was and remains a popular artist. Popularity, therefore, in itself is no criterion. But popularity widening with a widening circle, and unchanging amid changes caused by the widening circle of culture, is the foundation of permanence. Chaucer in our day has a wider audience than he had in his own, and his popularity widens with the ever-widening circle of those who can read him, therefore the critic will suspect that he has the three dimensions of every great artist, simplicity, harmony, generosity : in other words, the true, the beautiful, the good. Browning widens slowly, but does widen the circle of his audience, and so the critic will suspect the existence of the same dimensions in his work ; the audience of Thomas Hardy, like that of Emile Zola, grows less each year, and so a critic may suspect pessimism or some other ugliness or some other seeds of decay in the work of an author still living, and may conclude that he is a photographer whose work is of to-day's sun, and not an artist whose work challenges time.

The artist is, then, as free as the critic, each being tied from his own choice by the conditions of his art. Nature, too, has its laws just as Art has, and just because Nature is part of Art.

A wild animal is called free, and yet a lion can neither disobey the law of gravity, nor yet disobey the law of his own nature and become a cow. In the same way, a poet is not free to write blank verse which rhymes, nor a tragedy with a happy ending, nor *vers libres*, nor songs without melody. The first two are impossible, the last two are possible but tantamount to suicide. And they are laws not imposed by the critic but by Nature. The critic neither praises nor blames the parrot for his *vers libres*, but as a humble observer of natural phenomena he may legitimately refuse to rank the parrot with the canary in the rank of song-birds. On other grounds he may praise the parrot.

And such an attitude is derogatory to no artist and marks humility in the critic.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUM OF THE MATTER.

JUDICIAL PRAGMATISM.

While welcoming all possible aids which modern science can give us, whether of induction or otherwise, one feels to-day that criticism, as we have said, neither belongs nor can claim to belong to the category of the so-called exact sciences, although it will use the same pragmatic method whose worth these have proved. It, too, will first and above all be judicial, and one feels that in adopting this attitude it is departing in no way from the frame of mind of the best scientists. If, as Dr. Moulton argues, to be judicial involves some prejudice, we accept it and merely plead that every scientist is involved of necessity in the same charge.

It is true that no astronomer is prejudiced in favour of a fixed star as opposed to a planet, that a geologist does not look with contempt upon non-gold-bearing rock, nor a chemist despise a bromide because it is not a sulphide; but neither does a modern critic of literature, thanks to his knowledge of mistakes in the past, have similar prejudices. He will not condemn a poet because of his "eye in fine frenzy rolling," nor because his work belongs to the Silver Age, nor will he condemn the writer upon a dull subject on account of the absence of sparkle in his treatment. But he will have his own prejudices, and so has every scientist.

An astronomer is prejudiced by certain laws of astronomy, and similarly the chemist and physicist. He has, for example, a strong prejudice in favour of the law of gravity, and will only modify that prejudice when an Einstein may manage to compel him. A scientist, too, will have prejudices about instruments, apparatus, and methods of using them. A critic

will have similar human prejudices. He will have Wordsworth's "experiencing mind," itself a prejudice. Drama, for example, he may take for granted, must involve "movement" of some kind; he may have a prejudice that this is a "law" of the drama; but remembering history in the past and Einstein in the present, he will not dismiss with contempt the dictum of the great Belgian dramatist Maeterlinck that: "*An old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him—submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and destiny—motionless as he is, lives yet in reality, a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or the husband who avenges his honour.*" He will not refuse to the new static drama (such as Conan Doyle's *Story of Waterloo*) its right to be taken seriously; and he will either find room for it in the old formula on the ground that there is movement and conflict even in it, though the force is all on one side, that of Fate; or else he will come to the conclusion that movement and conflict is not so much the law of the whole drama as of its larger species. In fine, the modern critic, like his brother the modern scientist, has the modern philosophy, whose temper it is to feel no surprise at the possibility of fluidity or evolution in a "law," which, he knows, ceases to be final when and where it ceases to work.

Criticism for the modern is a science like logic or ethics or political economy, dealing with values in a department of human life: it classifies art products, providing elastic categories into which the art products will go, and endeavouring to find the scientific "laws" which best summarise the causes for difference both in their kind and their degree. Its task is, therefore, unending, as the human mind is always moving in an apparently unending process and carrying with it in its flight its range of production. Criticism consequently cannot be static and its laws must be always in evolution. While its cyclic register records deaths, it has its infinite scroll ever unrolling to inscribe the new births of the Time Spirit.

The individual critic may regard his science as normative in so far as he can give reasons for suspecting that his little norm is part of the greater norm registering itself upon this unending scroll of history, and not the mere prejudice of his age or tastes or personal bias. He must have some prejudices, as we have seen, but this prejudice, if he would approach perfection, he must eliminate as far as humanly possible. That he will not be able to do it altogether will be a gain, for it will make him interesting and keep him human, perfection or faultlessness being, as our master Longinus noted, intolerable in human composition.

The modern critic, like the modern scientist, having assimilated the lessons which history has given him will have a prejudice for humility. Just as a chemist does not impose laws of being upon the objects of his world of chemistry, so too the literary critic is nowadays content to register rather than to prescribe laws. And thus his universe will not be shattered when radium insists on becoming helium.

ART FOR ART'S SAKE.

As the critic has to deal with a product of the mind of man his humility will make him refuse the formula "Art for Art's sake." There is no such thing as Art apart from the mind of man, or if there be it is unknowable, and the unknowable is for a knower the non-existent. We would submit then, also with humility, that Ethics and Art touch but cannot clash, that any art product which is bad in ethics is bad in art too. If our modern philosophy has established anything, it has established this, that there is no such thing for science as man-in-himself; psychology and ethics know man as part of society, a social unit. The immoral in the sphere of art is then the unsocial, or rather the enemy of society, and may be called non-art or bad art. There can be no water-tight compartments in aesthetics, man and his activities being one and that one being a unit of the social whole.

THE LAWS OF GENERAL CRITICISM.

(A) CRITICISM A SOCIAL FUNCTION.

The first general law, then, or prejudice of the modern critic is that criticism is a social activity because art concerns society as a whole. His universe of discourse will implicitly be constructed on the assumption that a work of art in isolation is meaningless, unknowable, and so non-existent; criticism *in vacuo* is, therefore, preposterous because art *in vacuo* does not exist.

(B) THE FUNCTION OF A CRITIC.

His second law concerns critical practice and may be summarised, Each work of art has to be judged by its artist's aims. The critic's function is that of an interpreter, expounder, judge in the realm of taste not in the world of law. The modern critic puts and answers this question, What has the artist proposed to accomplish? How far has he succeeded in his aim? It is here that Carlyle's theory, though not always his work, anticipated modern critical practice:

" Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired ; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understand not their deep import." (*State of German Literature.*)

And in his later essay on Goethe he showed both by example and in his words how the critic should perform his task of interpretation:

" First we must have made plain to ourselves what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his own eye, and how far, with such means as it afforded him, he has fulfilled it. Secondly, we must have decided whether and how far his aim, this task of his, accorded—not with us, and our individual crotchets, and the crotchets of our little senate where we give or take the law—but with human nature, and the nature of things at large ; with the universal principles of poetic

beauty, not as they stand written in our text-books, but in the hearts and imaginations of all men."

Pope, who was so unexpectedly modern in some of his *dicta*, anticipated the first of Carlyle's Critical Imperatives, when he said that to try Shakespeare by the rules of Aristotle "is like trying a man by the laws of one country who acted under those of another." Carlyle's second commandment is in the nature of an ideal to keep always before our eyes, but one which, being mortal men, we may never hope to reach. Critics, too, are judged in the same pragmatic way by their success or failure as interpreters. Why is Prof. Sir Henry Jones' "*Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*" a work of sterling value as criticism? Simply because it has been the means of widening not only the mere numbers but also the mental range of readers of Browning; has lifted up, so to speak, so many children to the upper shelves, and not stood between them and the sweetness they would find there. With some other critics, on the contrary, the gateway has absorbed the building, which is only good when the critic like Johnson is great and the building like Savage is paltry.

SPECIAL LAWS OF CRITICISM.

(A) UNITY OF DESIGN.

There are certain art formulæ which have stood the test of time and which are still considered to be laws. The first is that of unity of design. Critics have condemned, and it would seem rightly, that delightful novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, because Dickens changed his mind, as he so often did, in the middle of his work (*e.g.* in the character of Mr. Boffin) but let the inconsistencies stand. Boffin was to have become by the force of temptation a villain, but Dickens grew, as we do, to love him, and so restored him his halo undimmed. One who loves this novel best of all the Master's works has yet to admit that the critics are right and that it fails to achieve artistic greatness on account of the notorious lack of unity in

its design. And this is not judging the author by extraneous laws but, as pragmatism demands, by the laws he proposed to himself when he wrote a novel round a plot, that is a novel to be judged by a definite design. Novels that are not written with a definite design, *e.g.* the modern plotless novels of the school of *Jean-Christophe*, would, of course, be criticised on other lines and those lines their own. The ordinary reader, it may be said in parenthesis, is always an Aristotelian, and for him in a novel as for Aristotle in tragedy the plot is the thing. It will be for those critics, who do not profoundly sympathise with his views, the task to raise his mind to the appreciation of the plotless novel. If they fail in the long run to do this, then it will have been discovered (what many think) that plot is an essential of the novel, for the Man-in-the-Street is in the long run infallible (*Securus iudicat orbis terrarum*).

(B) THE LAW OF ILLUSION.

The second Art formula is *Ars est celare artem*. Art must be natural. This is the great law of illusion. The supreme model of it in dramatic literature is the famous second scene of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where the author has much to tell us, and does it so naturally and easily, that we never suspect that Prospero is talking to us and not to Miranda. The conjuror must never let us see how he does his trick. And here the critics not unfairly condemn the great Thackeray, when in *Vanity Fair* and elsewhere he forgets that one cannot move in two universes at once. Children, who are unbiassed critics, rightly condemn the Punch and Judy showman who makes his fingers visible on the stage.

THE SPONTANEOUS.

This law involves the two different ideas of spontaneousness and inevitability. An artist's great work is rarely spontaneous, but it must always appear so. We take less interest in the prize chrysanthemum if we have seen the gardener at work on it with his clippers. A temple adds no beauty to a landscape

unless it seems to have grown out of the ground, and not to have been laboriously built upon it. In literature the "purple patch" is held not to mar the unity of design, when and when only the splendour of the purple blinds the reader to the existence of the patch.

THE INEVITABLE.

Inevitableness is a different conception. It is what Coleridge termed "untranslatableness," and Flaubert "*le mot juste*." A thought may wait for years for its soul-mate and may form many temporary alliances, until at last genius fixes it for ever in its lasting habitation and its name. Several Scots poets, for example, wrote "Auld Lang Syne" before Burns, and wrote it well, but Burns made it his own for ever just because he made the sentiment seem spontaneous and the expression inevitable. Here, for example, is the seventeenth century Semphill:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
And never thought upon,
The flames of love extinguishéd
And freely past and gone?
Is thy kind heart now grown so cold,
In that loving breast of thine,
That thou canst never once reflect
On auld lang syne?

This becomes with the eighteenth century Allan Ramsay:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
Tho' they return with scars?
These are the noblest hero's lot
Obtain'd in glorious wars.
Welcome, my Varo, to my breast,
Thy arms about me twine,
And make me once again as blest
As I was lang syne.

Semphill's would have contented us for ever, had not Burns seen with a flash of genius that "auld acquaintance" is of the masculine gender, and that therefore the song must be dedicated to Bacchus and not to Venus. The criticism was as

inevitable as Burns' version. What lover could sing of his love even in the sober North as "auld acquaintance"?—Romeo and Juliet's "auld acquaintance"!

The sentiment, although Semphill probably borrowed it himself, seemed to come (though we know it did not) straight from Burns' own heart and so is what we call spontaneous; the words seem made to fit exactly the sentiment, and so we call them inevitable; and hence, we call Burns' song both original and great.

(C) THE LAW OF ECONOMY.

The third canon is the law of economy of effort, or simplicity, which was expressed by our greatest artist in the formula, "Brevity is the soul of wit," and by "wit" the Elizabethan signified "artistry." Just as in the game of golf the best player is held to be he who holes out in the smallest number of strokes, so in the craft of letters he, who produces the effect intended with the least apparent expenditure of effort, is reckoned in the ranks of genius.

"Schiller," said Coleridge, "*has the material sublime; to produce an effect, he sets you a whole town on fire, and throws infants with their mothers into the flames, or locks up a father in an old tower. But Shakespeare drops a handkerchief, and the same or greater effects follow.*"

When Chaucer wishes to describe the avarice of his doctor he writes, "*For gold in physic is a cordial, Therefore he loved gold in special; the well-stocked larder of an English country gentleman, It snowed in his house of meat and drink*"; the spirit of a true student, "*And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.*" It is this marvellous economy of effort of his that sends us to find his match to those geniuses of the highest flight, to Dante with his countless lines of such magic as "*Amor che a null' amato, amare perdona*"; to Shakespeare with his "*Grief fills the room up of my absent child,*" with his "*multitudinous seas incarnadine*"; to Milton and to Keats and to all the great masters of literature. Genius in art is the ability to

do in a stroke what fumblers fail to do in many. Annotated editions of great poets furnish rich store of examples. Milton wrote :

No light, but rather darkness visible.

His best annotator writes : "What M. *means* is—not absolute darkness ('pitch darkness,' as we say), for then the '*sights* of woe' would have been invisible—but the gloom which half conceals and half reveals objects, and itself (to borrow Pope's words) '*strikes the sense no less than light.*' Mr. Beeching reminds us of Job x., 22."

In such ways do our annotators throw a light upon great poets' visible darknesses.

(D) BE THOU CLEAR.

The fourth great commandment which underlies the modern practice of criticism is what we have already mentioned as the supreme command of grammar, and that is the prohibition of obscurity. *Be thou as clear as the matter allows.* It is, of course, the supreme touchstone for prose, the language primarily of reason and of logic, but it has its uses even in the criticism of poetry, the language of feeling which has a logic of its own.

Speaker and singer, prose-writer, orator, and poet, agree in this that they have in their minds a message and an audience. We can admit to the full the poet's proud claim to be, as Plato put it, *ἐκφρων καὶ ἐνθεος*, out of his mind and filled with God's mind ; we can admit that poetry is a sort of divine enthusiasm, or to use Shelley's phrases, "eternal truth . . . as existing in the mind of the Creator," "Elysian light," "the interpenetration of a diviner nature" ; and yet we must, in all humility and in full consciousness of our own grosser clay, tell the poet that his poetry is some kind of a message and has some kind of a meaning. The meaning may transcend mere verbal expression, it may contain

Thoughts hardly to be packed
 Into a narrow act,
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped,

but still it must produce upon the hearts rightly attuned for the message the feelings that are aroused by the wordless telepathy of thought ; the chords of the sensitive heart must quiver in unison with the chords of the poet's lyre. Not more than this must the poet claim, nor does the true poet claim more than this, though the quack, the sham poet will. If we can haltingly, and each according to his degree, follow with our minds the sublimity of the message of Christ, our sublimest poet ; of Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Shelley, and Francis Thompson ; we must regard it as an impertinence to be told by a critic that Browning and Blake are so often obscure on account of the transcendency of their thought which soars above all human ken. For such a critic the pragmatic answer is ready, "Do you understand *in any way* the message ? If so, tell us, and let us judge."

The most useful fable for critics is that of the great mystic Hans Christian Andersen's, the Story of the King and the Suit Invisible to all but the Righteous, and every true pragmatic critic keeps this allegory pasted in his blotting-book along with Pope's shrewd pieces of common sense :

True expression, like the unchanging sun,
 Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon ;
 It gilds all objects, but it alters none—
 A vile conceit in pompous words expressed
 Is like a clown in regal purple dressed—
 Things seem large which we thro' mists descry,
 Dullness is ever apt to magnify—

And finally,

The worst avarice is that of sense.

Even to so great a writer and a teacher as Browning undoubtedlly is, the critic has the right of saying, Be obscure at your own peril. No bird ever sings for himself alone. A poet is no chimaera "*bombinating in vacuo*," but a living interpreter to living men. Sublimity of thought will explain the

difficulty of the Pauline Epistles, but they are not wholly obscure to the man of good will, and so still live : *Sordello*, *Fifine at the Fair*, much of Meredith's poetry, are obscure to men of excellent good will, and so remain with many volumes of metaphysical verse shrouded in dust, especially as the meaning which literary detectives have managed with trouble to squeeze out of them does not seem to be worth all the painful trouble of extraction. Sweetness of melody will atone for absence of intelligible meaning, and so, much of Swinburne, for example, will be judged as we judge piano music, and its meaning will be just that, but if a poet cannot sing, then critics must not pretend with all the solemnity of the augurs of old to extract poetry from what after all are but the grotesque hiccups of genius in its cups.

When Byron ended Stanza 180 Canto IV. of his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* with the so-called mistake in grammar known to every school-boy, "there let him lay," Browning, who detested the philosophy of his brother poet, took it upon him to correct this solecism in his *Fifine at the Fair* in the following words :

*Him who egged on hounds to bay,
Go curse, in the poultry yard, his kind : "there let him lay"
The swan's one addled egg : which yet shall put to use,
Rub breast-bone warm against, so many a sterile goose !*

Here Browning palpably can see the mote in the eye of Byron's muse but is blind to the beam in his own muse's vision. Grammar being so often, when not based on logic, a mere convention or fashion, being after all the science of expressing our thoughts with logical clearness, forgives any infringement of its temporary rules more easily than an offence against its eternal law, "Be thou clear, as clear as the matter will allow." Browning therefore fails here and in so many other places as an artist, because he cannot plead that it is the depth of the thought rather than his own careless clumsiness of execution, which makes his work too often as obscure as the worst stanzas of the worst Icelandic court-poet. On

the other hand, Byron could have pleaded precedent in English literature for his usage of "lay," could have pleaded that he was using the language of a Wordsworthian rustic in a state of excitement, could have pleaded that poetic licence would cover the case of the intransitive use of an active verb, that it was no worse, in fact, than writing "there let him wash" would have been. But Browning's sin is the worse because he missed his effect, and this is judging the poet, as we must, by his own laws. Browning meant to say something very cutting against Byron, something that would be always remembered, but for the ordinary English reader he might as well have written his satire in cuneiform on a brick and have buried it.

Who has not heard of the intolerable boorishness of some North-countryman being excused on the ground that after all "he has a heart of gold." A good excuse when enough gold can be found to make it worth the mining, but what if the mining is worth more than the few grains to be extracted? That there are grains of gold in the first half of *Sordello* or in the most uncouth of Meredith's verse no one but a fool would deny, but the question which the critic must answer is, Are they worth the mining? We who have so much rich payable ground in Spenser, Goethe, Dante, Shelley, and the thousand other goldfields of Parnassus, which it is pleasurable ease to work in beautiful air amid the songs of birds, must not be blamed if we neglect the possible grains of gold to be found in the unworkable quartz of a Cleveland or a Meredith. It is the business of the critic to draw, like Moses, water out of the rock, but the faithful Israelites would probably not have drunk the water of Horeb if they had been not in the desert but in a land flowing with milk and honey. At any rate, it is the peculiar function of the critic to make clear to us that the rock-water has a wonderful flavour all its own. And this our modern critic, Augustine Birrell, has done for some of the "alleged obscurities" in Robert Browning, and has thus achieved one of a critic's functions. No one has summed up

more neatly than he has in the same essay the implications of the critic's fourth commandment : "A sane man ought not to be unintelligible. Lucidity is good everywhere, for all time and in all things, in a letter, in a speech, in a book, in a poem. *Lucidity is not simplicity.* A lucid poem is not necessarily an easy one. A great poet may tax our brains, but he ought not to puzzle our wits. We may often have to ask in humility, What *does* he mean ? but not in despair, What *can* he mean ?"

" . . . Misty, therefore, the poet has our kind permission sometimes to be ; but muddy never ! "

And if that is the sum and substance of the matter for poetry, how much more applicable is this to all prose ?

We have read many defences for the opacity of so much of George Meredith's prose. The most cogent one can conceive is the essential difficulty inherent in popular exposition of all philosophy, and especially of psychology. We admit the difficulty, but deny that the opacity inheres so much in Meredith's subject-matter as in his manner. Meredith, we would submit, was not born to teach philosophy ; William James, Shakespeare, and Browning, each in his different way, was. William James could have made Einstein's difficult theory clear, if he had set himself the task. Browning, in his *Ring and Book*, did set himself a difficult psychological task, and his expression is as clear as his thought. Shakespeare puts a lamp inside the human soul. George Meredith in his worst moments makes the easy difficult, or the difficult more difficult, by the arduous gymnastics of a verbal contortionist. If the object of writing in prose is to convey clearly one's thought as one thinks it, then we must condemn Meredith and all his imitators, either on the ground of their having used prose, or on the ground of failure in their conceptions, for, as Benedetto Croce teaches in his *Æstetica*, expression and intuition are not two, but one ; what is obscurely expressed is obscurely intuited ; or, as John Morley wrote of Emerson, a great interpreter of life ought not himself to need interpretation. Still the obscurest work of men like Meredith, who are

great thinkers, has its value in this, that it remains a vast unsorted heap, whence some future genius will, like a Molière, find his gold and mint it as his own. As has been well said of Walt Whitman's work, it is not poetry but materials for poetry. He has dumped down valuable material for some future builder. Obscurity in prose is, then, the greatest fault unless it is wilful. This is the paradox involved in the commandment, *Be Thou Clear!*

The writer must primarily be judged by his own intentions, so that if his intentions involve mist and obscurity, we may have to praise him for the success which attended his efforts. Thus a great orator on the hustings, in Parliament, or at the bar, may deliberately intend to hide his real meaning, to throw dust in people's eyes, or to leave himself, as was said of Gladstone's great oratory, several loopholes out of which he may wriggle, if the need arises. An oracular obscurity would then be praised, but we can think of no other occasion, except in an enigma, on which it can be forgiven. Even here it will receive only the modified praise which is given to prudence or cunning or self-protection, compared with the highest praise which self-sacrifice, frankness, and courage obtain even in their literary expression.

(E) RETICENCE.

(i) *Artistic.*

Reticence is, of course, not to be confused with obscurity, the former being often a virtue, the latter a vice, or, if wilful, at the least a cowardice. Reticence takes two forms, the first that of the never to be sufficiently praised literary tact, which is part of the economy of effort we have already discussed. A great writer or speaker will have so worked upon the minds of his readers or audience, and have led them so far with him, that the smallest significant hint will cause them to complete the picture far more fully and richly than he could do it in hundreds of strokes. This is part of the hypnotism of genius and one of its happiest effects. Readers, especially in these

days when reticence seems to be a lost art, when verse-writers vie with novelists in the indecent exposure of the more squalid portions of their minds, are truly grateful to an artist who leaves something to the imagination, who sometimes pays his audience the welcome compliment of crediting it with some brains. Webster, who so often sins against artistic reticence, will in his greatest play put into the mouth of Ferdinand at the sight of his murdered sister's body: "*Cover her face ; mine eyes dazzle ; she died young,*" and the pathos surges tumultuously in our souls far higher than a speech which left nothing to the imagination could have effected. Shakespeare does this, of course, times without number: "*Put out the light—and then put out the light !*"—" *Poor Tom's a-cold*"—" *The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me !*" Browning will write in that marvellous dramatic monologue, *My Last Duchess*, the pregnant words: "*I gave commands ; Then all smiles stopped together.*" One could fill a volume with examples of such artistic reticence from Virgil, Tacitus, Dante, Milton, and all the supreme artists.

(ii) *Moral.*

The second kind of reticence is moral reticence, the golden mean between the indecencies of prudishness and of coarseness. If one may judge from much of our most modern literature, it is out of fashion at present, at least in fiction. Ever since Matthew Arnold attacked the Philistine (who had and has many good points), ever since Guy de Maupassant and Anatole France, and the French short story with obscenity treated artistically as its *motif*, became the model for our fiction, our writers shrink from the one extreme, that of prudishness. They are afraid of being sneered at as not up-to-date, and so are desirous of spicing their work in order to appeal to the most universal of all feelings, suppressed or unsuppressed lust. Provincial writers wish to be considered Parisian, artistic, men above petty prejudices, and, in their desire to shock the prude, disgust the normal man of normal

human decency of feeling. We have, too, shoals of women writers of fiction, who feel that they are hampered by their sex in their struggle for the high rungs on the ladder of success. They cannot climb in petticoats, and so they fling away modesty. Their one aim is to be virile. They catch at the man's coarseness, but carry off merely the surface dirt. And they write like strong men in hysteria. Yet they have not shrewdly gauged market values, for the great mass of simple readers they long to reach and to shock, buy up hundreds of thousands of copies of the work of the school which is the extreme opposite, the work of our Florence Barclay or of the American Gene Stratton Porter, which is an over-sweet mixture with too little variety in flavour. The works of this latter school are clean, certainly, as clean as soap, but one's mind cannot live on soap alone. On the other hand, the virile school, the male and female writers of strong fiction, who come two by two into the ark of realism, do not really shock us or surprise us, as much as they fondly imagine. They write the dirty little page or the dirty little chapter, which is to sell their book, and decent folk shrug their shoulders, for it is after all *vieux jeu* ; we have read our Freud. It is the oldest buffoonery in the world ; it is prehistoric ; it is found in the jungle and in the monkey-house of any zoo. The eighteenth century was not mealy-mouthed, but Pope assuredly did hit the blot when he said, "Want of decency is want of sense." When a rustic zany has exhausted his poor coarse humour, he has from time immemorial resorted to indecency to eke out the poverty of his wit.

Modern writers defend unreticence on many grounds, realism in art, *honi soit*, adult food for the adult mind—on every ground except the real one, the open secret, the pathological secret which everybody knows. To begin with, it is not realism. It is not the whole truth, but only a small part of the truth, that man is mere animal. There is quite a large world outside the wards reserved for nervous, functional, and mental disorders ; a world of health and nature which looks

at natural things in a natural way. The unreticent writer makes healthy things unhealthy, and sees the world with his own unhealthy squint. A realist who is also an artist knows that the primary duty of the artist is selection. One selects according to one's purpose, one's bent, one's own desires. As has been noted more than once, our dabblers in coprology fail in artistry where the French succeed, and many reasons have been assigned for it, one being a difference in the genius of the two languages. It has to be remembered that form, though the greatest factor, is not the sole factor in art : the matter, the choice of material has also its importance, wax-work can never hope to rank as high as marble sculpture, nor the dung-beetle to receive the admiration given to the bee.

REALISM AND RETICENCE.

The unreticent writer offends, too, in another way against realism. Reticence is part of realism. We are not seeking to dispraise writers like G. B. Shaw, who know how to attack our conventional morality, which is so often mere etiquette, our hypocrisies, and the conventional shams of a civilisation grown luxurious, boldly and vigorously and in plain Saxon without ever transgressing the line which separates moral reticence from bad taste. And yet, as he himself has more than once complained, a feeble-minded censorship has confused in his regard plain Biblical speech with the pruriency from which it is so far removed. Shaw at times may offend against artistic reticence ; he will let his characters prattle ; he will occasionally forget the artist's great adage that the half is often greater than the whole ; but he never offends against moral reticence, simply because he has the instincts of a gentleman, which instincts are as real as realism. No, the mistake which the unreticent make is want of taste, of artistic tact. They emphasise wrongly. Nature is not indecent, but an inartistic farmer may emphasise his manure-heap to such an extent that the atmosphere of his living-room may become

unbreathably indecent. Here the lady-writer who pants to be virile and only succeeds in being naughty, and her hysterical male confrère, are realists not as Nature is, but as a sloppy farmer is. In short, some decencies are fundamental and found among savages just as much as among civilised men, so that reticence and restraint are the true strongrealism, and lack of reticence and indecency mark the abnormal and the degenerate.

Reticence is, then, a literary commandment, and we conclude with the poet Schiller that an artist is known by what he omits, and with the Greek poetess Corinna that it is better to sow from the hand than from the basket.

(iii) *Reticence in Ornamentation.*

This leads us to discuss ornamentation, as over-ornamentation sins against artistic reticence. Here a distinction has to be made between poetry, rhetoric or prose-poetry, and prose.

Ornamentation of every sort has always been the chief prerogative of poetry, and secondarily of rhetoric. We recall Keats' advice to Shelley, "Load every rift with ore." Excellent advice when the poet or orator has the artistic tact and can distinguish gold from tinsel; dangerous, one would think, if it confirmed the popular delusion that a poet sits down deliberately to decorate his thoughts. This is artifice rather than true art and destroys spontaneity in the work. A true poet is not like the wanton who paints her face in a glass: a true poem has Nature's own colouring and is intuited as expressed. This in no way forbids "the labour of the file," any more than the prohibition of rouge vetoes a natural attention to toilet and dress. Over-ornamentation is, of course, a vice in a poem as well as in a prose-composition, but the impropriety is a question of relativity and can only be judged by the effect proposed to himself by the artist and by the material he is handling.

Walter Bagehot (*d.* 1877), a modern pragmatic critic, whose essays are models in criticism, divides in his essay on Browning and Tennyson poetry into three types, pure (wrongly

called classical), ornate (wrongly called romantic), and grotesque ; Wordsworth and Milton being types of the first, Tennyson of the second, and Browning of the last. He says that the essence of ornate art is to accumulate round the typical object everything which could be said about it, and that *Enoch Arden*, e.g. in classical style would not have taken three pages. The defect of the ornate, or our over-ornamentation, he finds to be want of simplicity and definition : nothing is described as it is, everything has about it an atmosphere of something else. He thinks the modern preference for the ornate and the grotesque to be the mark of a semi-educated age. He was happy in the moment of his death or he might have lived to have read our latest monstrosities, the vermifications of some of our verslibristes. Bagehot ascribes choice of the ornate style to artistic imperfection in characterisation :

“ The sudden millionaires of the present day hope to disguise their social defects by buying old places and hiding among aristocratic furniture ; just so a great artist, who has to deal with characters artistically imperfect, will use an ornate style, will fit them into a scene where there is much else to look at.”

While Bagehot's thought is always stimulating, I am inclined to think that in this essay he is less acute than usual. Surely the real distinction to be drawn is between the ornate and the flamboyant : ornate with restraint being classical, ornate without restraint bad Gothic. Through not seeing this distinction he is less fair to Virgil and Tennyson. It is, one would say, impossible to draw the line between pure and ornate ; many purple patches will be pure enough if the stuff can only carry the rich embroidery. Some subjects, too, seem to lend themselves naturally to pure, others to ornate treatment. Contrast, for example, Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* or his *Grecian Urn* with his *St. Agnes' Eve*. One element in the greatness of Keats is the inspiration of choosing infallibly the style which will suit the subject.

No subject, however, can carry off the over-ornate style, the rococo, or the flamboyant. Neither the slimmest Duchess in Mayfair, nor the Jewess the most opulent in charms in Johannesburg could carry off the barbaric bedizenments of Petticoat Lane. In literature as in life over-ornamentation proclaims unsoundness in the essentials :—

Still to be powder'd, still perfum'd ;
Lady, it is to be presumed,
Though art's hid causes are not found,
All is not sweet, all is not sound.

One would think that this is a question which can be decided only by judicial criticism, those instincts or prejudices of Aristotle's "man of sound sense," by the man of refinement.

Women of taste know that ornament is best when it seems not ornament but part of the wearer, that a well-dressed woman is never conspicuous ; and such critics have no difficulty in discriminating between the suitable and the flashy. One would think that it is the same for a poem or a speech. If one feels that the ornamentation is an integral part of either, that the ornaments do not by their dazzle distract attention from the reality, then a critic cannot bring accusations of floridity and over-decoration. Youth and inexperience will tend to attach over-importance to the glitter rather than to the substance, as may be seen from occasional failures of that supreme but youthful master Keats, and from the perennial popularity of Macaulay's weaker qualities with youthful readers. On the other side one must always remember that there must be artists for every age, and a pragmatic critic is not likely to fall into the mistake of thinking that the tastes of a man of forty or a woman of thirty are a touchstone for all literature. We would not sneer to-day, for example, at the laureate of the nursery as "Namby-Pamby," but we would put upon an infinitely higher pedestal another nursery-laureate, Hans Christian Andersen, because he in his wider sweep took in Ambrose Philips, and higher circles as well.

In prose from the very beginning of literary criticism what Dionysius of Halicarnassus called the "Asiatic" style, or what we term the Florid, or "Babu" English, or the bombastic, has always been denounced.

Prose is for use, poetry for beauty. Hence any ornamentation which hampers use has unreservedly to be condemned.

PROSE AND THE NOVEL.

Take the novelist as an example. His primary intention is, or should be, to tell a story, not to keep a secret. Psychological dispositions and minute character analyses, if they interfere with his plain tale, or sentences over-elaborated through a diseased passion for verbal jugglery, are plainly out of place. A modern novel must have psychology, we freely grant, but it must not *be* psychology. There has been in the world no greater psychologist than Shakespeare, but he never reminds us of it. With him we seem to study our psychology in the open air, with the lesser artist Browning in a laboratory, with George Meredith in a diving-bell. Our physiological machine functions best when we are least aware of it. A lecture on the physiology of the digestive apparatus is (or was in happier times) out of place at a dinner party. But not less is a psychological lecture out of place (or will be in happier times) in that feast of reason known as a novel. The psychology works best when it is least obtruded : it is the salt in the dish which flavours but does not dominate. And knowing this Lawrence Merrick has written four novels of remarkable power, and *Laurels and the Lady*, the greatest short story in the language.

Unfortunately, this criticism is old-fashioned (but also, we hope, prophetic) because to-day many novels are so formless that it is impossible to define the novel as an art term or form in art. The novel has become, it has well been said, the Gladstone bag of literature : anything may be squeezed into it and it bulges out to an alarming extent. The old idea that a novel was a prose epic with plot and characterisation has been

abandoned. We have had the novel with a purpose which could still be a novel, and we have come to the novel without purpose, coherence, or finality. The revolution has been as great as if, in the building trade, futurist builders should insist on being paid for houses that had neither rooms nor doors nor roofs. We have novelists who scamp their work and others who never finish it. An artistic ending, they will tell you, leaves much to the imagination—and so does a house without a staircase or roof. But, if we have read the signs of the times aright, the future lies, as the past has lain, with the novel with a plot. And such novels as the “Jean Christophe” *genre* will be classed, not as novels, but as studies in sociology.

“It is not the business of the artist to supply brains,” has, of course, been said. This is true: that is the business of the critic. But it is the business of the artist who, after all, aims at affording pleasure, not to confuse one form of art with another, a sonnet or a love story with a guessing competition or a Chinese puzzle. A coterie may admire the cryptic artist for many reasons, for fashion’s sake, from affection for the artist, or for the vanity of belonging to some exclusive or secret society, but they know, as we know, that the marks of a great artist are simplicity, largeness, universality of appeal. With this specific difference as his test, a critic is safe in classifying artists of every possible type.

As prose is for use, the final pragmatic test of the goodness or badness of ornament in prose will be, Does the ornament interfere with the use? If so, good as the ornament may be in itself, the prose is bad as prose. A great writer has compared prose to a cup. A good cup is one from which we can drink with ease. Ornaments may make the cup more valuable, more beautiful, and yet not interfere with the goodness of the cup. But it is clearly excess of ornamentation when the user of the cup tears his lips and fails to get a drink.

Modern critics have here their great work, to preach in season and out of season against effeminacy and Orientalism in our Western art. It is comforting to feel that we have

critics of the virility of G. K. Chesterton and others like him whose endeavour it is to bludgeon pretentiousness and euphuism out of English literature. G. B. Shaw follows Dr. Johnson in urging us to clear our minds of cant: the younger pragmatic critics of the day are trying to free our literary style from cant. They have much work to do because we have much so-called poetry which is nothing but affectation, a cant of bizarrerie, pretentious and obscure ugliness, the last whiffs of miasma from our last decadence in the '90's of last century. And our poets of promise like Ralph Hodgson, in whom we augured another Keats, sing all too rarely and are leaving the critics to fight their battle unaided. But, thanks to the critics, the future looks bright.

CHAPTER IX.

PROSPECTS OF CRITICISM.

In no previous age of literature has there been so much excellent reviewing and criticism as there is to-day in England. We expect this department of literature to flourish especially after an epoch of literary creation, and to prepare the paths for a coming creative epoch. We have every right to hope that a time so rich in good criticism will have served to usher in a glorious age of literature, which may surpass in accomplishment the Romantic Revival, or even, if it be possible, the Age of Shakespeare.

The spirit of tolerance, of generosity, of looking to the merits first and the faults second, of following à-Kempis's golden advice, *Look to what is said rather than to the sayer*, reigns to-day in the writers for our critical press as it has never done before. The only adverse criticism of modern reviewing that makes itself heard is that the business manager's interests sometimes control the literary department ; that none but advertisers need apply for recognition ; that the more profitable the advertiser the better review will the advertised book receive. This has been true of some periodicals happily defunct, and may be true still of some second-rate journals, but it is happily not true of our greater organs of criticism, such as the *Nation and Athenaeum*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *London Mercury*, the *Saturday Westminster*, *Punch*, the *Observer*, or our larger monthlies and quarterlies.

Matthew Arnold could not to-day write of England with truth : " What is at present the bane of criticism in this country ? It is that practical considerations cling to it and

stifle it ; it subserves interests not its own ; our organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends to serve, and with them these practical ends are the first thing, and the play of mind the second. . . . An organ like the *Revue des Deux Mondes* . . . we have not ; but we have the *Edinburgh Review*, existing as an organ of the old Whigs . . . the *Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the Tories. . . . The *Dublin Review* subordinates play of mind to the practical business of Roman Catholicism."

To-day Whig and Tory have ceased to exist for the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*. One reads in an English review like the *Times Literary* a highly sympathetic criticism of a book of poems by an Irish Sinn Feiner, or of a book of prose by a Russian Bolshevik. The *Dublin Review* will gracefully acknowledge the literary merit of Exeter Hall.

And this modern spirit of disinterestedness in literary criticism, this absence of provinciality, of sectarianism, are due in the main to that great teacher whom we have just cited, to Matthew Arnold himself, and to his master in this respect, Thomas Carlyle, and to the line of teachers of criticism such as Minto, Bagehot, Dowden, John Morley, Walter Raleigh, George Saintsbury, Quiller-Couch, Richard Moulton, and J. M. Robertson (to mention but a few names out of many), who have carried on and are carrying on the same generous tradition.

OUR FREEDOM.

In English poetry freedom has ever been the note of our greatest achievement all down the royal line, from Chaucer to Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton ; from the great Elizabethans to Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats ; from the great Romantics to Browning. Our criticism to-day is great because it is also free.

Freedom, however, is a much-abused term and a fruitful mother of fallacies. Absolute freedom is, of course, a chimaera, and in literature, as in politics, freedom implies

some government : that is to say, some restraint, the minimum amount of restraint which is compatible with rational civilised existence. A free criticism which denied the existence of all laws is as much an absurdity as free verse or free love, both love and verse implying bonds and duties. One is free to love or not to love, as one may choose, but not to be a free lover ; one is free to write drama or not, but one may not write free drama, that is drama, let us say, without characters. It is important to insist upon this because the idea of freedom is too intoxicating a draught for many minds, and we find to-day a few critics writing as if the freedom of criticism implied anarchy. Nothing is farther from the truth, and the healthy instincts of the unsophisticated general reader are right when he refuses to call formless verse poetry, or a plotless play drama, just as the simple countryman is right when he refuses to call butter some chemical product of the town. There is no dogmatic tyranny in all this, produce as much *vers libre* as you like, but at least be as honest as your commercial congeners, and for heaven's sake find a new name for your artificial product, and don't call your margarine "free butter." There is no Trade Label Act in literature, and booksellers cannot, unfortunately, be made to refund money obtained for volumes labelled "Poetry" which are deficient in mental food values.

THE USE OF THE LABEL.

Do not imagine that this is a plea for a return to critical bondage. It has always seemed to me that the modern denunciation of labels in criticism or philosophy has been considerably overdone. Labels are an extremely useful institution, and save many dangerous mistakes, as every good housewife or chemist knows. "No labels in matters of the mind," shriek many modern philosophers. This is a pretty cry, calculated to catch the unwary thinker. But what if the modern dislike of labels in philosophy is due to there being nothing to label ? Formlessness, chaos, wish-wash, cannot be

labelled, but a Descartes, Spinoza, or a Berkeley can. We can label an honest art product such as butter or a sonnet, and write a scientific description upon the label. This we claim to be the special critical function of the analyst, literary or otherwise. Despite the superior person whose dictum is very much quoted in philosophical circles to-day, labels are an imperative necessity. We have, of course, to see to the qualifications of the label-writer. I may well be wrong, but it has always seemed to me that the frequently heard boast, "I refuse to wear a label, to be ticketed!" comes quite as often from timidity, from fear of having to make a defence, and of being found out, as from the proud gesture of unbending independence and freedom from servility which it is too often meant to convey. With some critics and some philosophers it connotes a readiness to throw missiles at the Aunt Sallies of other philosophers, especially dead ones, combined with a desire to conceal prudently one's own target. Criticism—in fact, all philosophy—is a battlefield in which to shrink from regimentals is due, let us put it charitably, from the not unnatural desire to avoid drawing the fire of an enemy.

Nature herself wears labels—large, flaunting labels—for those who have eyes to see them. Nor is this surprising if we remember that, as we have said before, Nature is part of Art, which in its widest sense means the expression of design existing in some mind. Our greatest thinkers have always seen this: witness Wordsworth on every page, witness Shakespeare, who tells us explicitly:—

*Yet Nature is made better by no mean,
But Nature makes that mean. So over that art,
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art,
That Nature makes. . . .*

*This is an art,
Which does mend Nature—change it rather, but
The art itself is Nature.*

Epic, drama, lyric, criticism are, therefore, natural products, like oaks or elms, beehives or loaves of bread. Each has its

essence, each has its law of kind, and you, poet, gardener, or baker, defy them at your peril. Horace and eighteenth-century criticism said the same, and let us always honour them for it and for the service they rendered to literature. Here is where our best modern criticism departs from its parent, Romantic Criticism, in the humble confession: We are not the people, nor will wisdom die with us!

Let us not, with all our prized freedom, despise, then, labels and laws which are found everywhere in Nature. These laws a critic, literary or scientific, learns inductively by experience and applies judicially by the condensed experience known as taste and tact:

*The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.*

Such laws are not now held to be those arbitrary commands issued to the Eternal Artist by the man of science or to the poet by the critic, as in the bad old days of materialism, which, if the poet tried to keep, he could get this praise only:—

A Poet! He hath put his heart to school,
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff
Which Art hath lodged within his hand—must laugh
By precept only, and shed tears by rule:

but those very laws of his art and being as an artist, which he cannot disobey and remain artist.

Just as to-day the man of science is proclaiming the emancipation of God from the shackles of evolution, so, too, is the critic preaching the essential freedom of the artist. We no longer say that the age of miracles is past; we are ever, in fact, announcing new ones. We look on a linnet with reverent eyes, and stand in awe at the miracle of a Francis Thompson or an Edith Cavell. We are beginning, too, to perceive dimly that all freedom consists in obeying a higher law, and that law and freedom are not contradictories but correlative terms. Acting on the knowledge of this truth is the one

thing wanting to save the world, whether of politics or of art, from its present state of anarchy. Only under the law is there freedom : only the truth will make us free. We must go humbly back to the old, sane ideal which makes the true poet one who has given up his own life for the divine vitality.

*How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold ;
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
But from its own divine vitality.*

And what these laws are, in so far as they affect the critic of to-day, has been set forth, I hope not altogether inadequately, in this unpretentious essay, which here reaches its conclusion.

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